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Student and teacher perceptions of race relations in a rural, Northwestern Ontario secondary school

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Student and Teacher Perceptions of Race Relations in a Rural, Northwestern Ontario Secondary School

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Abstract

Schools in Canada reflect the country's racial diversity. Race relations therefore is an issue that most schools face. In this study, teacher and student perceptions of race relations at a secondary school were explored, including students and teachers' lived experiences and how, if at all, they feel racism in schools should be addressed. The two main racial groups in the school were White and Aboriginal. The participants in this study were grade 11 students of Aboriginal and White descent, and a sample of teachers. A qualitative research methodology was used to explore participant perceptions. To collect data, interviews were conducted, writing tasks were administered, and a document analysis of the Board's anti-racism policy was done. Students had a wide range of perceptions of race relations in their school, from denial of any difference between the groups, to anger over unequal treatment of the two groups. Participants provided their own definitions of racism and explained how it is or is not present in their school. Many students and teachers reported cases of racial name-calling, jokes, slurs, and stereotypes. Teachers discussed some challenges of teaching in a racially diverse setting. Most students and teachers believed that schools have a responsibility to address racism, and provided suggestions for doing this. Implications of the findings are discussed, as well as recommendations for the school and the school board.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Description of Research Study

For my thesis, I conducted a qualitative case study of a secondary school's teacher and student perceptions of race relations. Data were collected via an open-ended writing task, focus group interviews, and document analysis. Participants included students from both the dominant racial group (White) and racial minority groups (Aboriginal and visible minority), three White teachers and one Aboriginal school counsellor.

Background

Canada is a multicultural society; its policies embrace a pluralist philosophy. Under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, people from all racial and ethnic backgrounds are assured equal rights. Nevertheless, the reality of Canadian society demonstrates that racial inequality exists: Both overt and systemic racism are pervasive and continue to have an adverse impact on visible minorities and Aboriginal peoples (Alexander, 2000, p. 1). Overt racism manifests itself in incidents of racism that occur sporadically throughout the country.[1] Since the events of September 11th, the fact that Arab and Muslim communities have experienced increased discrimination (Kunz, 2002) demonstrates that the problem persists. Meanwhile, systemic racism is evidenced in

[1] For recent examples, a man was found guilty of burning a cross on the lawn of a Black family in Moncton, NB (CRRF News Release, July 7, 2002), three non-Native teenagers were accused of driving onto the Blood reserve in Alberta and opening fire with paintball guns on October 8, 2002 (Canadian Press, October 9, 2002), and five members of the White Power group were found guilty of beating a 65-year-old East Indian man to death in Surrey, B.C. on January 4, 1998 (Rediff, October 1999).

statistics showing higher percentages of Aboriginal Canadians in low-paying jobs, higher crime and incarceration rates, and higher unemployment rates (Dussault, 2000). Other racial minorities face similar disadvantages in Canadian society in terms of high poverty rates and unemployment rates (Gee & Prus, 1998; Jackson, 2001; Kunz, 2002).

Schools reflect larger societal realities, and, as Harper (1997) argues, because racism exists in society, it must also exist in schools (p. 201). As Barakett and Cleghorn (2000) observe, although many believe schools provide equal educational opportunities for all students, the reality indicates that inequality exists (p. 6). Systemic racism is evidenced in the disproportionately high drop-out rate, or perhaps more accurately, the "push-out rate" (Dei, 2002) and failure rate of racial minority and especially Aboriginal students (Bolls, Tan & Austin, 1997).

That being said, schools do have power to address racism and to affect change. Indeed, schools may be one of the few places where "racial understandings can be successfully challenged" (Lewis, 2001, p. 802). Through attention to explicit curriculum and instruction and the hidden curriculum, schools can create an environment of critical inquiry and reflection that can lead students and teachers to interrogate racism and fight it.

In Northwestern Ontario, research indicates that racism is an important issue in schools (Haluza-Delay, 2002; RMYC, 1994). In this study, I investigated the issue of race relations in a rural secondary school in Northwestern Ontario, whose two main racial groups are Whites and Aboriginals. In this particular community, students of the two racial groups are schooled separately during their elementary years, as there is a

school in the town and one on the reserve. As such, there may be limited interracial contact until students reach high school.

In Northwestern Ontario, and indeed, in all of Canada, there are communities that have high schools that integrate different racial groups. By describing the perceptions of race relations in this particular secondary school, this study may interest administrators, teachers, students, as well as other researchers who have chosen to ask questions about race relations in their own schools.

This study adds to the body of research on race relations in schools. There are many different aspects of this broad topic to explore, and this study investigates several unique ones. For example, all the other race relations studies I have found were conducted in urban environments. The setting of this study is therefore distinct in that it is a small, isolated town; the closest urban center is over 250 km away. Small towns in Canada have lower levels of racial and ethnic diversity than do urban areas (Statistics Canada, 2001), and this demographic fact may impact on residents' racial perceptions.

Research Problem / Questions

This study explored and described student and teacher perceptions of race relations in a rural secondary school environment. Specifically,

- What are student and teacher beliefs about the current status of race relations in the school?
- What are the lived experiences of students and teachers in regards to race relations in the school?

- How, if at all, do students and teachers feel racism in schools should be addressed?

Rationale

The issue of race relations in schools becomes increasingly important as Canadian society becomes more and more diverse. The 2001 census measured 13% of Canada's population as being from a visible minority group, and 3% being of Aboriginal descent (Statistics Canada, 2001). Schools reflect this diversity, and so it is important to examine this issue.

This study provides a portrait of the perceived status of race relations in a rural secondary school in Northwestern Ontario. Existing research shows that there is a history of racism in Northwestern Ontario schools. A 1994 report on race relations in regional high schools conducted by the Multicultural Association of Northwestern Ontario states that over 60% of students indicated that racism was a problem in their respective high schools. Aboriginal people were clearly indicated as the most targeted population (RMYC, 1994). More recently, a 2002 report on racism in Thunder Bay states that, "schools were the second most frequently mentioned place in which interview participants had experiences of racialization. It was also one of the most commonly cited locations in which survey respondents observed or experienced discrimination based on race" (Haluza-Delay, 2002, p. 74). Given the results of this research, it is extremely important to examine this issue of racism in schools in the area, and to work to address it.

In the early 1990s, several community members from both the town and the closest reserve formed a group to address racism in the community. The group called themselves the Four Colours race relations committee. This group met regularly, alternating meeting places between town and reserve. During each meeting, the group would hold a potluck meal together and then hold a traditional sharing circle, in which every member had a chance to speak about racism in the community[2]. The fact that a group such as this was formed indicates a concern from community members about race relations. This study continued the now-dissolved group's work, and in fact, I received funding from this group to support my study. In return, upon final approval of this thesis, I will provide a summary of findings to the board, school administration, reserves, education authorities, former leaders of the race relations group, and those participants who have requested it.

Although other studies have explored aspects of this broad topic, the study I conducted is unique in many ways. For example, I have found no studies that explore race relations in a rural school setting. Also, there appear to be no studies on race relations of a predominantly White and Aboriginal school; other studies have explored White and Black relations or White and Asian relations[3].

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[2] I learned on January 29, 2003 through discussion with a former member of the race relations committee who will remain anonymous in order to keep the identity of the community anonymous.

[3] In this paper, I have capitalized the words Aboriginal and White to indicate different racial groups. Terms indicating race can be problematic because race is a social construct. I have used Tatum' (1997) guidelines for language concerning race.

Limitations

The case study approach has inherent limitations; I explored the experiences and perceptions of students and teachers in a particular school, at a particular time. Thus there is a limited ability to generalize the results of the study.

Due to the requirements of a Master's thesis, the study was kept to a certain size and scope. As such, school staff, administration, and parents were not interviewed or consulted about their perceptions of race relations, even though their perceptions would add insight to the study.

Most people know that overt racism is socially unacceptable, and this knowledge may influence their responses to questions or prompts concerning racism in their schools. Admitting to racist perceptions may have been difficult for participants. As such, participants may have been hesitant to discuss racism.

I used a writing task to ask students and teachers about their perceptions of race relations (Appendix A). Responses may have been limited by writing ability, although I did provide teachers and students with a variety of ways to express themselves within the writing assignment parameters.

Personal Ground

As a researcher, I bring my own bias and background with me as I approach this study. First of all, I am White. I am the daughter of European immigrants, and as such have a Western background.

I also approach this study both as an insider and as an outsider. As an insider, I am a member of the community and live in the town where the high school is located. I

know this town and the local area well, having lived here intermittently since 1996. I am also a teacher who has taught in the study school as a supply teacher on three occasions, and who holds a teaching position at an elementary school in the town. In this capacity, I identify with many of the White participants in this study, especially the teachers. I also know many Aboriginal people in the area, particularly in one of the reserves. I have worked closely in a previous job with many members of this community. I have developed some close friendships with some Aboriginal people and participate in cultural activities.

On the other hand, I am an outsider in relation to the Aboriginal participants in the study. As a White Canadian, I do not know what it is like to be in a minority group. It is my cultural group that holds power in society, and I enjoy the privileges that this power grants me. I cannot really know the disadvantage that Aboriginal people suffer nor feel the "sting" of racism in a personal way (Fleras and Elliott, 1999).

Living and working in the study community, I have heard different reports of racism in the schools of the area from some parents, teachers and students. As a teacher, I have witnessed racism in my classroom. In response, I want to help address and reduce racism in the community and the schools.

Definition of Terms

Aboriginal

The original peoples of North America and their descendants (INAC, 2002).

First Nation

A word similar in meaning to Aboriginal. This term has been adopted by some communities to replace the term "Indian band" (INAC, 2002). In this study, I use this term to describe the communities of origin of Aboriginal participants.

Native

A word similar in meaning to Aboriginal (INAC, 2002). In this study, I've used this word to describe the high school course, "Native Studies".

Perception

A way of regarding, understanding, or interpreting something.

Race

"The supposed existence of biological types of human being" (Miles, 1993, p. 2).

Race Relations

The way in which members of different races feel about, understand, or behave towards each other.

Racism

> Any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life" (UN, 1965).

Prejudice

"An attitude (usually negative) developed toward members of a group; it is an opinion made in advance and not based on evidence" (Ghosh, 1996, p. 11).

Stereotype

"Social constructs in which groups of people are identified in terms of fixed

images associated with specific attributes, particularly those of colour or culture" (Ghosh, 1996, p. 11).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

To provide a context for this study of race relations perceptions, it is important to situate it within existing scholarly writing on the topic. This literature review provides a background on race and racism, schools' approaches to race relations, factors affecting minority students' engagement and achievement in school, and similar studies of perception of race relations in schools.

Race and Racism

Race is a problematic concept, because it has been scientifically proven not to exist. Scientists agree that there is no genetic basis for different human races: "Pure races, in the sense of genetically homogenous populations, do not exist in the human species today, nor is there any evidence that they have ever existed in the past" (American Association of Physical Anthropologists, 1996, p. 569). Therefore, human beings cannot be legitimately categorized according to race using biological criteria (Miles, 1993).

Although race may not be valid scientific concept, it is undeniable that race has social meaning. Race can be understood as a social construction that was developed with a specific historical purpose: to legitimize the control of one group of people by another. As Ghosh (1996) writes, "racism developed as an ideology of power to rationalize the subordination and oppression of local populations" (p.10).

Racism can be understood as taking three forms: individual racism, systemic racism and cultural racism. Individual racism refers to "personal attitudes or actions that prejudge or discriminate on the basis of race" (Haluza-Delay, 2002, p. 4). Systemic

racism "consists of the policies and practices of organizations, which directly or indirectly operate to sustain the advantages" of certain groups over others (CRRF, 2000, p. 1). Finally, cultural racism is the "basis of both other forms of racism, as it is the value system which is embedded in society which supports and allows discriminatory actions based on perceptions of racial difference, cultural superiority and inferiority" (CRRF, 2000, p. 2). In this study, all three forms of racism are considered.

Schools' Approaches to Race Relations

Race relations in schools is an issue because racism exists in society. Indeed, "the problem of 'race relations' stems from racism, the exercise of power by one racial group in its own interest and against the interests of others" (Moore, 1984, p. 41). Canada has a long history of racism, including colonial treatment of Aboriginal peoples, internment of Japanese Canadians during WWII, and exclusionary immigration policies (CRRF, 2000). This legacy of racism has manifested itself in schools' historical treatment of different racial and ethnic groups.[4]

Over the years, schools have taken a variety of approaches to race relations. Suppressing difference and aggressive assimilation was the approach earlier in Canada's history, as evidenced in the case of Aboriginal peoples in residential schools and with the treatment of new immigrants of non-Anglo Saxon ethnic groups (Harper, 1997). Another approach was separation and segregation of racial groups, providing

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[4] For example, residential schools in Canada suppressed Aboriginal language and culture (Harper, 1997), and Black immigrants to Canada were denied admission to common schools (Harper, 1997).

different schools for ethnic and racial groups (Harper, 1997). These two approaches had devastating effects on the groups that were to be assimilated or segregated, and are no longer considered acceptable by the dominant culture, which regards Canada as a place where all people, regardless of race, are treated fairly and equally (CRRF, 2000).

Today, there are three dominant approaches to race relations often used in schools: the colour-blind approach, the multicultural approach and the anti-racist approach (Harper, 1997).

Colour-blind Approach

The colour-blind approach to race in schools is based on a belief that "race is a social category of no relevance to one's behavior and decisions" (Schofield, 1997, p. 256). It supposes that teachers and students can ignore each other's race, and treat all in a uniform way. Proponents of this approach "ignore or minimize differences among students and demand the same educational treatment for all" (Harper, 1997, p. 197).

This approach is rooted in the widespread belief that our society operates as a meritocracy, where people succeed or fail on the basis of their individual merit, and that race, gender and class have no bearing on whether one fails or succeeds. This belief extends to theories of success in schools: "individual effort and ability lead to higher achievement in school, and therefore, to higher social status" (Barakett & Cleghorn, 2000, p. 6).

The colour-blind approach to race is attractive to teachers and administrators because it appears to assure fair treatment for all. In addition, its consequences, which include the reduction of the potential for overt conflict, and the minimizing of discomfort

or embarrassment are attractive to people who do not want to deal with racial tension (Schofield, 1997).

The colour-blind approach to race in schools has been criticized by those who believe that race is essential to one's identity, and that ignoring race means ignoring the particular struggles that only certain racial groups face: "denying difference has the potential to eclipse the difficulties particular groups of students encounter" (Harper, 1997, p. 198). There is no doubt that certain racial groups face unique problems in Canadian society; the colour-blind approach denies that this reality should be considered in school.

This approach has also been criticized because it tends to lead to complacency and failure to acknowledge and act on injustices: "color-blind ideology serves to explain and thus protect the status quo-the current racial formation" (Lewis, 2001, p. 801). Schools that do not acknowledge racial differences are likely to maintain these very differences.

In addition, the colour-blind approach can actually encourage an environment of discrimination and prejudice:

> ...[the colour-blind approach] can ...foster phenomena like the taboo against ever mentioning race or connected issues and the refusal to recognize and deal with the existence of intergroup tensions. Thus, it fosters an environment in which aversive racists, who are basically well-intentioned, are prone to act in a discriminatory manner. (Schofield, 1997, p. 267)

The colour-blind approach, although it is used with good intentions, can lead to greater discrimination because it ignores race and racism.

Multicultural Approach

In Canada, a country that has adopted a policy of cultural pluralism, multicultural education has received much attention in recent years. There is currently no consensus on a definition of multicultural education (Banks, 1994; Mansfield & Kehoe, 1994; Scott, 2001). However, most writers agree on its three main goals: "equivalency in achievement among different cultural groups, positive intergroup attitudes, and development of pride in heritage" (Kehoe, 1994, p. 354).

Multicultural education attempts to develop a particular attitude among students: "Developing a multicultural perspective means learning how to think in more inclusive and expansive ways, reflecting on what we learn, and putting our learning into action" (Nieto, 1992, p. 216). It is the hope of multicultural education that students will become open to diverse world views and perspectives, which will in turn lead to more acceptance and equality for all.

It has been noted that "increasing students' knowledge and understanding of cultural differences does not necessarily lead them to change their behaviour and attitudes" (Harper, 1997, p. 200). Multicultural education traditionally puts more of an emphasis on celebrating differences in cultures rather than looking at challenging students' own beliefs and attitudes concerning difference.

Indeed, one of the main criticisms of multicultural education is that it superficially looks at different cultures through activities such as "the study of 'exotic' cultures, [and] in multicultural days" (Ghosh, 1996, p. 3) without examining issues of power that are at the root of racial inequality. This leads to education that celebrates the status quo, and ignores the difficult realities that some groups face: "Ignoring issues of power can

undermine the efforts of minority and others in their struggles for equity and justice" (Harper, 1997, p. 200). Most forms of multicultural education do not consider society's unequal power distribution, which is at the root of racism.

Anti-Racism Approach

The anti-racism approach to race in schools attempts to confront racial inequalities by looking at the power issues that fuel them. Indeed, "anti-racism education may be defined as an action-oriented strategy for institutional, systemic change to address racism and the interlocking systems of social oppression" (Dei, 1996, p. 25). The anti-racism approach to race in schools has also been termed "critical multicultural education" because unlike traditional multicultural education, it "names the issues of race and social difference as issues of power and equity rather than as matters of cultural and ethnic variety" (Dei, 1996, p. 25). It looks critically at society and history to discover the roots of oppression.

Anti-racism education also has its critics. Some view the anti-racism approach as being too political (Mansfield & Kehoe, 1994). School is viewed by many as an environment that should be politically neutral, and thus no place for challenging social inequality and racism. Also, some suggest that anti-racism education "may have the unintended effect of exacerbating rather than ameliorating the very problems it identifies" (Mansfield & Kehoe, 1994, p. 423). In bringing attention to the issue of racism, some critics suggest that it only serves to emphasize difference and make it even more difficult to diminish racism.

These three approaches to race in schools are not the only ones, but they are the ones most widely used in schools today (Harper, 1997). There are certain

combinations of approaches that may occur; for instance, school staff may use the colour-blind approach when dealing with students but may teach a multicultural curriculum. However, it should be noted that, by definition, a colour-blind and anti-racist approach are mutually exclusive.

Personally, I identify most with the third approach to race relations, the anti-racist approach. Schools are places where society can be critically examined. I believe that in order to address racism, it must be clearly identified, discussed and directly challenged. If racism, or other forms of social injustice, such as sexism and classism, go unchallenged in the classroom, then these oppressive systems are often unconsciously maintained and perpetuated. Thus the privileged in society maintain their status, and those who are not privileged remain that way as well. As a teacher, I have the opportunity and responsibility to be an agent of social change by challenging students to think critically about society and its power inequalities.

This view of education fits within the framework of critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy is concerned with "understanding the relationship between power and knowledge" (Barakett & Cleghorn, 2000, p. 76). This type of education critically examines society and the systems that maintain inequality. It follows in the tradition of critical theory, which is "an attempt to understand the oppressive aspects of society in order to generate the conditions for change and empowerment of those who have been silenced and invisible" (Tierney, 1997, p. 4). With critical pedagogy, teachers have the power "to unmask the material conditions of students and their relationship to the world, in order to effect socio-political change" (Lutzenberger, 2001, p. 4). Anti-racism

education is an example of critical pedagogy in that it recognizes oppression in society and tries to create the conditions for change.

Studies of Race Relations in Schools

Studies have indicated that the school environment has a role in student engagement and achievement. While several different factors have been identified as having a bearing on student engagement and achievement, I will focus here on three factors that may particularly impact minority students, including participation in school activities (Aviles, Guerrero, Howarth and Thomas, 1999), low teacher expectations of minority students (Aviles et al. 1999), and teacher stereotypes of minority students (Ryan, 1998). These factors have come into play in student and teacher perceptions of race relations in this study.

Student participation in school activities has been found to be important in student engagement and achievement. Aviles, Guerrero, Howarth and Thomas (1999) conducted a qualitative study of the causes of Chicano/Latino dropping out of high school. The researchers found that "engaging in school activities was an important motivating factor for remaining in school" (p. 468) but Chicano/Latino students were rarely encouraged and often discouraged from participating in such activities.

Low teacher expectations of minority students can also have a profound effect on student engagement and achievement. Aviles et al. (1999) found that low teacher expectations resulted in student drop out: "participants reported that lower expectations for Chicano/Latino students by school staff and teachers resulted in lower graduation outcomes' (p. 469). Many students reported to the researchers that they were told by teachers and administrators that they would not graduate. If teachers do not have

equally high expectations for all, it is likely that those who are expected to underachieve will.

Low teacher expectations of minority students are often the result of stereotypes. Teacher stereotypes of students can have a strong impact on student engagement and achievement. As James Ryan (1998) notes, "one useful way of understanding how young men and women of certain ethnic/racial backgrounds are systematically placed at a disadvantage in schools is through the practice of stereotyping" (p. 295). In a study that explored the process and effects of stereotyping in a racially diverse school, Ryan (1998) found that there was a "tendency of both teachers and fellow students to hold and act on stereotypical beliefs about different others" (p. 291). Ryan found that many teachers used stereotypes to judge their students; for example, many teachers feared Black males because they believed they were violent by nature. This impacted these teachers' ability to teach this group of students, and as such, it put these students at an academic disadvantage.

Amanda Lewis (2001) researched the colour-blind approach to race relations in schools. Lewis conducted a study on the issue of race in an almost all-White suburban community in the United States. She interviewed teachers, students, and parents. She found that race was "downplayed, trivialized, or [the claim that it was significant was] challenged" (p. 790) by teachers. Students, she found, tended to be aware of race and some had racist attitudes, but because of the prevalence of the colour-blind ideology, were discouraged to talk about race at all; as a result, racist attitudes were left unchallenged. Parents "saw colour" too, and held racist attitudes that were also

unchallenged. Thus Lewis contended that the colour-blind approach to race relations limited opportunities to question and address racism.

Janet Ward Schofield (1997) investigated the colour-blind approach to race in a middle school of 1200 children that had made efforts to foster a multicultural environment, and had a biracial, White/Black staff. During the four-year study, Schofield and her team conducted observations and questionnaires, open-ended interviews, and document analysis. Schofield found that the faculty, both Black and White, subscribed to the colour-blind view of schooling. In fact, teachers were hesitant to even acknowledge another's race, as though this were a sign of prejudice; race was a taboo topic. Students were quite conscious of race, but were also aware that they might be viewed as prejudiced if they mentioned it. Schofield concluded that the colour-blind approach failed students and teachers because it did not recognize intergroup tensions.

These studies are significant because in both of them, teacher and student attitudes toward race and students differed. Teachers professed to not notice students' race whereas students were very aware of race in the school environment.

Linda Valli (1995) captures in her study the tension between being colour-blind and being "colour conscious" in teaching. She investigated the experiences of a group of White preservice teachers practice teaching in a culturally diverse school. For one semester, she conducted interviews, observations and discussions with nine White teacher candidates from a Catholic university in a US East Coast city who were placed in schools with predominantly Black students. Valli interpreted the students' experiences as a tension between the two contradictory maxims: *If you don't see the*

colour, you don't see the child and *Teachers should be colour blind.* She recommends that "teachers must both see and not see color" (p.126), that is, they should not subscribe fully to either of the approaches. Rather, "only when they are viewed in dialectical relation do the mandates reveal the tensions and issues of race that new teachers must learn to handle" (p. 126).

Lynn Thomas and John Willinsky (1997) studied students' perceptions of racial and ethnic tensions in twelve Pacific Rim countries' high schools (including Canada, Australia, Columbia, the US, and Japan). They surveyed 157 children in total. They found that the presence of racial and ethnic tensions in schools was widely felt by students and that "students everywhere commented on the elements of race and culture, of home and school, of history and ignorance, as factors in these tensions" (p. 373). The researchers also found that many students were able to "recognize the policies and practices that make up institutional racism" (p. 373). The students believed that schools have a role in developing understanding and acceptance among students. This study shows that students do place responsibility on schools to address and foster positive race relations.

George Sefa Dei (1996) conducted a three-year study to explore Black students' perspectives on school racism, with emphasis on the causes of student disengagement and drop-out. More than 200 high school students were interviewed about their school experiences. Dei found that students felt some teachers had low expectations of them, and some students found themselves labeled and stereotyped. In addition, many female students experienced sexism from their peers. Students felt that their heritages were excluded from the school curriculum. In contrast to the colour-blind approach, he

states that teachers should "openly discuss the concept of race in their classroom teaching" (p. 58) and "cultivate a safe atmosphere for students to talk back and forth...on the issue of racism and other forms of social oppression, and how they impede students' learning" (p. 59). Thus Dei advocates an anti-racist approach.

Julie Kailin (1999) investigated White teachers' perceptions of racism in their schools. She administered an open-ended questionnaire to 222 teachers in a Midwestern US middle-class school district and found that a majority of White teachers attributed racial problems to Blacks, that is, they "blamed the victim." She also found that "of those who witnessed racist behavior by their White colleagues, the majority remained silent and did not challenge such behavior" (p. 724). She states that "because teachers play a pivotal role in the sum total of race relations in education, it is critical to consider how they perceive the problem of racism in their schools. Their perceptions may influence decisions about how to interpret and respond to racial inequality" (p. 724). Teachers' perceptions are thus also important to understand, for they have much power in setting the tone for race relations in a school.

Thomas Dunk's (1991) study of social relations in Thunder Bay provides insight into White male northern Ontarian's perceptions of Aboriginal Ontarians. Dunk conducted a two-year ethnography of a group of White working-class men in Thunder Bay. He found that prejudicial attitudes among this group were "very important" and that members of the group's actions reflected these attitudes. Dunk states that "in jokes, insults, expressions, and general banter and gossip, the Indian stands for negative personality traits" (p. 211). Meanwhile, all members of the group "claimed to personally know individuals of Aboriginal ancestry whom they liked and even

considered friends" (p. 211). Dunk argues that the negative image of Aboriginal is not simply due to economic conflict between Aboriginal and Euro-Canadians in the region, but also due to the unique regional context of these particular Euro-Canadians, who define themselves, in part, in terms of their perceived superiority over Aboriginal peoples.

When relating the above studies to the one I have conducted, several important issues arise. First, teacher and student perceptions of race relations in the same setting can differ greatly (Lewis, 2001; Schofield, 1997). Teachers may have a tendency to perceive race as unimportant, but students may perceive it as significant. To address this, I asked both students and teachers about their perceptions, and have compared the two.

Teachers' perceptions of their students in regards to race can have enormous impact on their treatment of students (Aviles et al., 1999; Dei, 1996; Kailin, 1999; Ryan, 1998). Teachers may tend to treat students of racial minorities differently, and put them at a disadvantage. To address this, in this study I asked both teachers and students if all students, regardless of race, are treated equally and fairly.

Students may expect schools to address race and racism (Aviles et al., 1999; Dei, 1996; Thomas & Willinsky, 1997). I designed my data collection tools to allow participants to discuss how, if at all, students and teachers feel racism should be addressed in schools.

Aboriginal people in Northwestern Ontario face prejudice from White people (Dunk, 1991), even though White individuals may have friends who are Aboriginal. In my study, I investigated whether or not this same behaviour exists in a school.

There are several gaps in the research that my study fills. First, it provides insight into a rural school's race relations; all the other studies' settings were urban. Second, it investigates Aboriginal - White relations in a school setting; I could find no other study that investigated this particular biracial grouping. Third, Dei's (1996) and Ryan's (1998) were the only similar studies conducted in Canadian schools, so this study adds to an understanding of race relations in schools in the Canadian context.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Research Design

In selecting a research design for this study, I had to consider my own personal philosophical approach to research. I believe that there is not one objective truth to be uncovered but that people construct their own truths. I decided a qualitative design would best help me gain access to these. The qualitative design of this study allows for students and teachers to describe their own experiences and thus provides a rich and multi-layered account of race relations at the school. Because I asked participants to express their perceptions and experiences in their own words, unexpected themes presented themselves over the course of data collection. This caused me to pursue other themes as they arose, while recognizing constraints imposed by time and the ethical review process.

I used a case study design because it provided me with parameters within which to explore a particular phenomenon. Also, a case study design is an appropriate design for a Masters of Education thesis because it establishes boundaries: the scope is appropriate for this level of research, while still allowing for an in-depth examination of a complex issue. More specifically, I conducted an instrumental case study, that is, I examined a particular case to provide insight into an issue (Stake, 1994).

The theoretical framework for the study is situated within the constructivist-interpretive paradigm. Using this approach, "research is conducted through interaction between and among investigator and respondent...this interactive approach is sometimes described as hermeneutical and dialectical in that efforts are made to obtain

multiple perspectives that yield better interpretation of meanings" (Mertens, 1998, p. 14). The multiple perspectives of study participants provide a window into the perceived state of race relations in the school.

Setting

The setting is a small town in Northwestern Ontario with a population of under 5000. The town has one public secondary school of 400 students, 60 of whom are Aboriginal. Located about 15 kilometres away is a First Nation reserve with a population of about 400 people. This reserve has its own elementary school and a small alternative secondary school, but the majority of students attend the secondary school in the town. Another reserve, located 80 km from the town, has a population of about 300 people. This reserve also has its own elementary school and alternative secondary school as well; most high school students from this community also attend the town's secondary school.

The town is quite racially homogeneous. According to the 2001 census, 4% of the town self-identified as visible minorities, which is well below the national average of 13% (Statistics Canada, 2001). Five percent of the residents of the town self-identified as being of Aboriginal descent (Statistics Canada, 2001). In the town's high school, the proportion of Aboriginal students is higher, at 15%, due to the fact that Aboriginal students are bussed in to the community from the two reserves.

Methods

For my study, I used three different data collection methods: a writing task, focus

group interviews and individual interviews. For each method, I developed a separate tool to collect teacher and student data. As well, I analysed documents such as the school board's anti-racism policy.

The writing task (see Appendix A) was given to a sample of both students and teachers. It consists of a variety of prompts to elicit their perceptions of race relations in their school. Students were given a half-hour to complete the task, which was administered in class by their teacher. I suggested that teachers also take the half hour to complete the task themselves.

This instrument is loosely based on a tool used in a similar study by Thomas and Willinsky (1997). In this study, teachers administered it to students during social studies classes. The tool used in Thomas and Willinsky's study differs from the version of the tool used in this study in several important ways, however. Thomas and Willinsky's tool emphasizes the presence or absence of racial tensions, whereas the instrument used in this study focuses on the status of race relations, as this term is more neutral and does not automatically assume the presence of racial tension. The tool used in this study allowed students and teachers a variety of means of expression (an essay, a list, a report of a personal experience, a poem) whereas Thomas and Willinsky's tool did not offer different options for mode of expression. The rationale for offering options is to provide students and teachers with a choice, and to generate a wide variety of responses, expressed in a way most comfortable or powerful for the respondent.

I selected a writing task as a data collection instrument because it allowed me to gather data from a large number of students and teachers and could be a rich source of data. It is open-ended enough that it allowed students and teachers to express

themselves in their own words, thereby hopefully providing insights into their unique perspectives.

On the top of the first page of the writing task, students and teachers were asked to identify their racial or ethnic group so that later I was able to compare White, Aboriginal, and visible minority students' perceptions. Each writing task was transcribed as it was written by the student and includes any errors in spelling, punctuation, and grammar.

In addition, I also conducted interviews with students and teachers. I conducted focus group interviews with a sample of the students who had completed the writing task (See Appendix B). I followed Patton's (2002) standard open-ended interview approach and developed a series of questions that I used as a base for the interview process. I used the interview guide with some flexibility, allowing for the opportunity to pursue subjects of interest as they arose. All interviews were mechanically recorded via audiotape and then transcribed by me for analysis.

I selected focus group interviews with students and teachers because they provide a forum in which people can discuss their perceptions and often stimulate discussion on relevant topics that may not have been otherwise introduced. On a potentially contentious issue such as racism, I thought that focus groups would provide more balanced perspectives than individual interviews, because they "provide checks and balances...that [may] weed out false views" (Patton, 1990, p. 336). Focus groups are particularly effective for gaining insight into adolescent perspectives on issues (Bogdan & Biklen, 2000).

I also conducted an analysis of relevant school records including the school

board's racism policy. This analysis provides information on the school's culture as it relates to racism, including its official stance toward race relations. I then compared it to teacher and student perceptions during data analysis.

I kept a research log throughout the study in order to track methodological actions and decisions as they arose, as well as reflections on the process and interesting patterns, themes and ideas.

The variety of data collection measures helps provide triangulation of the data to ensure design validity and increase agreement on the description of phenomena (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). "Different strategies may yield different insights about the topic of interest and increase the credibility of findings" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001, p.408). Triangulation allows for the consideration of many perspectives, and the opportunity to gain repeated or common perspectives: "using multiple perceptions [clarifies] meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation" (Stake, 1994).

Sample and Procedures

I selected this high school for the case study because it has a large population of Aboriginal students alongside a White majority. The school is unique in that most students have been racially separated until high school, because each group attends schools in their home community, that is, Aboriginal students attend an elementary school on their reserves and area White students attend the elementary school in town. This means that race relations in school may be a new issue to them. The school board approved my research. When I was in the early stages of conceptualizing my thesis

research, I met with the superintendent of education of the school board and described my general area of interest, which was inter-racial relations in the town's schools. She encouraged me to pursue this issue, as she perceived it to be an important one that had not been sufficiently explored or addressed. She said that such research would benefit the school and the board.

The sample included people from two different groups within the secondary school: students and teachers. Different research tools and sampling methods were used for each group.

I requested that students complete a writing task in two English classes, and one Aboriginal Beliefs, Values, and Aspirations in Contemporary Society class. This latter class is a Native Studies course that covers contemporary Aboriginal culture, and as such, attracts Aboriginal students; it is also the only Native Studies class offered in the school. I chose to administer the writing task in English classes because English is a required course for all students, and therefore there will be students from all groups in these classes. Also, as the task is a writing task, it fits in with the subject matter of English. The principal asked for teacher volunteers to administer the writing task in class, and three teachers came forward: the teacher of Aboriginal Beliefs, Values, and Aspirations in Contemporary Society and two English teachers. The task was administered during class time as a voluntary writing exercise. The English teachers who volunteered to administer the task were both grade 11 teachers, one teaching a College Preparation level course, the other teaching a University Preparation level

course.[5] I thought that grade 11 students would be good candidates to engage in the writing task as they had already attended the school for two full years and thus had more experience with the school, and might have a level of sophistication in their reflection and writing that younger students may not.

In addition, I asked that students who were enrolled in the Aboriginal Beliefs, Values, and Aspirations in Contemporary Society class (also a grade eleven class, although students from various grade levels were enrolled in the course) to complete the writing task. I asked that this group complete the task because I wanted to have input from Aboriginal students and assumed that the majority of students in this class would be Aboriginal. In fact, there were no White students taking this class at all, which is interesting in itself.

I collected 13 writing tasks from the Aboriginal Beliefs, Values, and Aspirations in Contemporary Society class, 18 from the College Preparation English class, and 18 from the University Preparation English class, for a total of 49 student writing tasks.

I randomly selected fifteen teachers through systematic sampling (McMillan & Schumacher, 2000) to complete the writing task. In addition, I asked the teachers of the Aboriginal Beliefs, Values, and Aspirations in Contemporary Society and English courses to complete the writing task. Twelve teachers agreed to complete the writing task, but only two returned the task to me. These two teachers were not ones who had administered the writing task in their classes.

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[5]In Ontario, secondary school students have the option of three streams to follow when choosing senior level high school English courses: Workplace Preparation, College Preparation and University Preparation.

I conducted two student focus groups, each racially homogenous, that is, one Aboriginal and one non-Aboriginal. The rationale was that culturally sensitive issues were likely to arise, and students may have felt they could speak more freely if students from the other culture were not present.

The students who participated in focus groups volunteered to do so. On the writing task, I asked those interested in taking part in a group interview to sign their name and provide their phone number. In the three classes who completed the task, only one student volunteered for the interview. To find more volunteers, I wrote a letter to each class that included a sign-up sheet (see Appendix C) and asked the teacher to read it aloud to the class and then pass around the sign-up sheet. This strategy worked well and provided me with the students I needed for my White focus group. Only two Aboriginal students volunteered to participate in a focus group, so I contacted an Elder from one of the reserves and asked her to recommend a few students who attend the high school who might be interested in participating. In the end, there were four students at each focus group interview.

I had also planned to have teachers who had completed the writing task and who had volunteered to participate in the focus group interview. No teachers volunteered. I contacted teachers personally and arranged for a focus group but no teachers attended. I tried again to arrange a focus group but met with some difficulties in contacting teachers as it was near the end of the school year and they were unreachable at school. I decided to change my methods, as organizing focus groups was not feasible. I instead conducted one-on-one interviews with three White teachers and one Aboriginal staff member (a counsellor). I decided to interview the counsellor because there are no

Aboriginal teachers on staff and this was a perspective I felt I needed. In the interest of anonymity, I refer to this counsellor also as a "teacher".

Time Frame

I began data collection in May, 2003 and finished July 8th, 2003. Data were analysed during this phase but the main portion was done after the termination of data collection. I took a hiatus between data analysis and writing the thesis for work and personal reasons.

Ethics

I secured informed consent from all participants prior to the start of data collection. To obtain this consent, I met with the high school principal, received his consent, and he in turn obtained consent from the school's teachers. All interview participants received cover letters and signed consent forms (Appendix C), and I discussed the ethical implications of the study with all participants prior to interviews. These letters and forms outlined the purpose of the project, the voluntary nature of participants' involvement, and the issue of confidentiality. Parental consent was obtained for students under the age of 18. The letter included the following ethical considerations:

- Students participated in the writing task on a voluntary basis. Teachers did not use the task for evaluation purposes.
- Participants' identities remained confidential at all times. Participants are not identified by name in the study, or by any means that may compromise their

anonymity.

- Participants could withdraw from the study at any time.
- All data collected from this research study is the property of Lakehead University and was kept secure at all times throughout and after the study. The data will be kept for seven years and then destroyed.
- A summary of the findings will be available to all participants.
- The findings will be disseminated in several ways.

A full copy of the thesis will be provided to the participating high school, the school board and the education counselors from each reserve. A summary of the study will be provided to participants who requested one, as will the school, the school board, members of the education community on the reserves, former leaders of the race relations group, and any other interested people. In addition, I will offer to present the study to the school and the school board and to any other group who is interested. In February 2004, I presented preliminary findings at Lakehead University's Annual Graduate Studies & Research in Education Conference. I plan to apply to present the study at other academic conferences as well, and may submit an article for publication.

Data Analysis

Due to the qualitative nature of the study, an inductive approach to data analysis was used (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Data analysis began in the field with the first data collected, and continued throughout the data collection phase. This initial analysis informed and refined the following data collection.

Interview transcripts, written documents, and writing tasks were analysed using a constant-comparative method, "qualitative comparing and contrasting each topic and category to determine the distinctive characteristics of each" (McMillan and Schumacher, 2001, p. 468). In examining the data, certain patterns emerged; these patterns were concepts, groups of words, expressions, or experiences that appeared in different participants' words. Throughout my initial examination of the data I kept this question in mind: "Which data are central to the story that is unfolding around the phenomena?" (McMillan and Schumacher, 2001, p. 78) These units of data that had similarities I grouped under certain headings, or codes. Initially, I began with 119 codes or headings, which described patterns in the data. After more re-reading and comparing and combining headings, I reduced the number of codes to 44. I ordered the data under these codes and began to read them very closely and record their similarities and differences, to note any questions or comments that I had, and to record my initial analysis of them. I also took note of specific quotes that seemed related to the code that I could use later in my discussion.

After going through each code in this way, I experimented with different broader categories into which the codes could be comfortably sorted. Eventually I settled upon 13 of these broader categories for my codes. Finally, after considering and analyzing these categories, I developed four themes for my data.

Here is an example of the theme – category – code relationship. One theme that emerged was "Meaning of the Current Race Relations Situation." A category within this theme was "Current state of race relations in the school," and a code within this

category was "Racism is ignored." Pieces of data that were classified under this code are:

- "Any School staff who observes or receives a report of a racial incident shall not ignore or refuse to investigate the incident." (Board Policy)
- "Racism is in our school, but it is just not admitted by anyone."
- "Racism in school is often ignored."
- "I think that the teachers in our school look the other way when the subject comes up."
- "Mainly all people ignore the teachers when they talk about such issues [racism]."

A table showing all of the themes, categories and codes I developed for the study follows.

Table 1: Themes, Categories and Codes of the Study

Theme	Category	Code
Meaning of the Current Race Relations Situation	Participants' Definition and Understanding of Racism	Definitions/Understanding of Racism
		Language Around Race
		Racism Against White Students
	Current State of Race Relations in the School	General Descriptors: Status of Race Relations
		Frequency at Which Racism Comes Up at School
		Racism Ignored
	Setting	Rural Setting
		Lack of Diversity
		Larger Community
	White Perceptions of Aboriginal Students	Conflicts as Personality Clashes or Racism?
		Perception of Infrastructure in Place for Aboriginal

		Students
		Aboriginal Students Taking Advantage
		Aboriginal Students' Disadvantages
		Special Treatment of Aboriginal Students / Double Standard
	Social Mixing in Student Body	Interracial Mixing
		Inter-reserve Divide
		Importance of Group Support to Aboriginal Students
		Extracurricular Activities, Sports
Manifestations of Racism	Verbal Manifestations of Racism	Negative Comments / Name Calling
		Slurs
		Jokes
	Stereotypes of Aboriginal Students	Stereotypes
	Physical Manifestations of Racism	Violence/Fights
		Hallways: Pushing, Bumping
	Female Conflicts	Female Racial Conflicts
	Specific Racial Incidents / Anecdotes	Specific Incidents
		Personal Anecdote about Racism
		Stories of Positive Race Relations
Teacher Experiences with Race Relations	Teaching Aboriginal Students	Teacher Treatment of Aboriginal Students
		Teaching a Diverse Class
		Absenteeism
		Teaching ABVA[6]
		Multicultural Teaching and Curriculum
Responses to Race Relations Situation	School's Response to Race Relations Situation	School's Present Treatment of Racism
		Office Treatment of Incidents

6 ABVA refers to the course Aboriginal Beliefs, Values, and Aspirations in Contemporary Society

		Conflict Resolution Around Racial Incidents
		School Consequences of Racism
		Police
		Teacher Comfort Level in Dealing with Race Relations Issues
	What Schools Should Do About Race Relations	Strategies for Dealing with Racism in School
		Addressing Racism when it Comes Up
		School's Role in Dealing with Race Relations

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

In this chapter of my thesis, I present the findings of my study. Four major themes that emerged: the meaning of the current race relations situation; manifestations of racism; teacher experiences with race relations; and responses to the race relations situation will be discussed in sequence.

The first theme, the meaning of the current race relations situation, includes participants' definitions and understanding of racism, perceptions of the current state of race relations in the school, the impact of the rural setting on the race relations situation, White perceptions of Aboriginal students, and social mixing in the student body.

The second theme, manifestations of racism, treats verbal manifestations of racism reported by participants, stereotypes of Aboriginal students, physical manifestations of racism, specific racial incidents, and female racial conflicts.

Thirdly, teacher experiences with race relations includes teachers' experiences of teaching Aboriginal students.

The fourth theme, responses to the race relations situation, treats the school's response to the race relations situation and participants' opinions of what schools should do about race relations.

Meaning of the Current Race Relations Situation

Students and teachers discussed their perceptions of the current race relations situation at their school. This theme includes participants' understanding and definition of racism, their perceptions of the current state of race relations in the school, their

thoughts about the setting and its impact on the situation, White student and teacher perceptions of Aboriginals students' experience at school, and participants' thoughts on interracial social mixing in the student body.

Definitions of Racism

In all, 55 participants gave a definition of racism, with four from teachers and the rest from students. Most people defined racism as something negative that causes harm. Common words used to describe racism included: "discrimination" and "prejudice," "hate" and "stereotype." In terms of what constitutes racism, many participants suggested "treatment," "an act," "words," and "feeling/thought." Racism, said participants, was different treatment based on race, colour, ethnicity, and/or nationality. Some said it could also be based on background, religion, beliefs, or language. Typical examples of student definitions of racism were "discrimination against another race" or "racism is...prejudice against someone because of their skin colour or nationality."

Most of the definitions of racism were consistent with the one articulated by the United Nations that was discussed in the introuduction. Some different definitions were also offered. Several participants stated that racism was something that did not necessarily cause harm. Seven participants, both Aboriginal and White, teachers and students, used neutral language in describing racism, citing it as "different" treatment of a group. One White student wrote, "I would define racism as treating people of different races differently." For these participants, racism is any different treatment of a group, and is not characterized as either good or bad.

Two participants (one Aboriginal and one White) mentioned in their discussion of racism that racism could be positive or negative. In her interview, one teacher stated:

> ...there's good racism and there's bad racism. And good racism the way I see it, is identifying different cultures of people and bring out the good things in it, the positive in it, and that sort of thing...And I think the bad racism is...the name calling, and I guess it's just the negative side of it.

This teacher viewed racism as setting apart another culture, be that in a positive way through celebrating it, or in a negative way through name-calling. Similarly, another student stated that racism can be positive or negative:

> Student 1: [Racism is] being treated differently just because you're of a different race.
> Student 2: Negatively?
> Student 1: Well it can be positive or negative. I mean, mostly you see people being downtrodden for it, but say because they're like this everyone thinks they're so much better and treats them different. That's still racism, it's just not negative toward that group of people.

For some of these participants, then, racism is not always a negative thing.

Definitions and Personal Language

In Aboriginal participants' definitions of racism, students used personal pronouns to describe the victim of racism, such as "you," "I," or "we." One interview participant stated: "I define racism as being discriminated because of your colour...your origin, where you come from how you look." Another Aboriginal student wrote, "Racism is when you are treated differently because of your background." Even more strongly, another wrote, "Racism...to me is when people hate you are an Indian, when I never did anything to them. They think we are all bad." Of 17 definitions of racism given by Aboriginal students, eight used personal pronouns to identify the victim of racism.

In contrast, all but one of the 38 White participants who provided definitions of

racism used nouns rather personal pronouns. Their definitions discussed victims of racism as "people," "a person," "a group," "populations," or "someone." A White teacher said "[Racism] is looking at a group of people with a predisposed bias...it's a way of putting oneself in a higher position than someone else." A White student wrote, "For me, racism is when groups of people are isolated...treated with disrespect." The one White student who did use a personal pronoun in a definition of racism, used it to describe a perpetrator of racism: "Racism to me is when you hate or descriminate [sic] against another race because they are a different color."

Current State of Race Relations in the School

Both in the interviews and in the writing tasks, teachers and students were asked to describe in general terms the state of race relations in the school. Of the 67 people who responded to this question, 40 (including White and Aboriginal participants) felt that race relations in the school were "fine." These participants frequently used phrases such as the racial groups "get along" and race relations are "OK." One Aboriginal student wrote, "At our school, students of different races get along pretty well." A White student wrote, "I think students of different races get along fine at my school." Interestingly, there were many responses that described the situation in "not" language: "not bad," "not a crisis," "not a problem", etc.

Three teachers described the situation using similar language: there are underlying issues and once in a while these issues will come up. Said one teacher: "Generally speaking I think [race relations] are good, and I think that there are a few incidences or trouble spots that rise up on occasion." Another teacher stated, "I don't

think it's a big crisis here...it's not chronic, but they flare up every now and then." These teachers understood racism to be an issue that is present but in the background, only occasionally coming to the surface.

Others disagreed. Fifteen students, five Aboriginal and ten White, responded that race relations were not good. They used terms such as "worse than people think," "worse than people will admit," and "a majority don't get along." One White student wrote: "The race relations in our school are choppy. Between the natives and the white people...you can see that neither group is comfortable with one another."

Does the Subject of Racism Come Up Often in School?

In the writing tasks, I asked how often the subject of racism comes up at school, and in the interviews, I asked how often racism is talked about at school. I did not specify what aspect of school (for example, curriculum, class discussion, or special presentations) because I wanted students to give me an overall idea of how often the topic of race is addressed in any situation. Most participants agreed that the subject of racism does not come up often in school. Among White participants, more than twice the number of people responded that it comes up "not often," or "not much" compared to those who responded that it comes up often. In contrast, Aboriginal students were divided in half between those who said race came up often and those who said it does not come up often. All participants agreed that the subject of racism seems to come up most often in class or because of a problem or conflict.

Even though, overall, most participants agreed that the topic does not come up often, there are different interpretations offered by participants to explain this. One

teacher said, "we haven't had a lot of it which I think speaks well of the school"; similarly, a White student commented that racism does not come often "because it's not a big problem." In contrast, another White student said that although racism does not come up often, "each and every person in [the school] knows it's present." Another White student said that although racism does not come up often because "no one wants to believe there is racism."

Four White students wrote that racism is ignored at school. Said one participant: "I think that the teachers in our school look the other way when the subject comes up." This issue came up elsewhere in the data and will be discussed later.

Setting

One unique feature of my study was that I conducted it in a rural setting. The other studies I found were all situated within an urban environment. Although I did not ask any questions directly about the setting, it did emerge as the third category under the theme of meaning of the current race relations situation.

Some students commented on their perceptions of the school as not being diverse. Five students commented on this lack of diversity. One White student wrote: "There are only two different groups making up [the high school] consisting of Caucasians and Natives." Another White student compared the town to a larger centre that is more diverse: "there is not as much cultural diversity here compared to Toronto." In these students' view, the school is not that diverse.

A comment on this lack of diversity came from one White student who, in his writing task, didn't acknowledge any racial diversity at all: "The closest thing we have to another race around here is the Aboriginal people." This comment reveals a certain lack

of understanding of what racial diversity is.

Participants noted both positive and negative consequences of this lack of diversity. One White student wrote: "Living in a small community, we are more prone to be judgmental or pass judgment on other people because there is not as much cultural diversity here." She saw a lack of diversity resulting in people being more judgmental toward each other.

One of the teachers had a different interpretation of the setting. She argued that since the school is small, people tend to know each other better and this leads to more compassion and understanding of differences: "And probably...the personal interest tends to ease a lot of racial tensions or it gets rid of some of the stereotyping because we tend to look at ourselves as one big group." A White student agreed: "[Race relations in the high school] are not that bad. It's probably because it's such a small town, everybody knows everybody, so they don't really tend to just look at how they look like or whatever. They just know who they are so no big deal." Both of these participants interpret the small town as something that minimizes racism, reasoning that if people know each other, they would not be racist.

Still, three participants mentioned that racism not only exists in the school, but in the larger community as well. A teacher said that she thinks that it is more of a problem in the community: "I think that the stereotypes are more prevalent in the community than they are in the school...I would say it's very common in the general community."

White Participants' Perceptions of Aboriginal Students In School

Although no questions in the interviews or writing tasks directly asked about White participants' perceptions of Aboriginal students, this emerged as a fourth category

under the theme of meaning of the current race relations situation. Many students and teachers had definite opinions about such things as the school infrastructure that is in place for Aboriginal students, Aboriginal students' advantages and disadvantages at school, and a perceived double standard that exists in the way the school treats students of different races.

Within the school, there is a certain infrastructure in place to support Aboriginal students. As discussed previously, Aboriginal students come from one of two reserves that are close to the town. Each of these bands has hired an Aboriginal counselor to act as a liaison between the school and the students. This person has an office area, which provides students from each band a place to go within the school where they can be with people from their own community.

Aboriginal Student Advantage

The interviews and writing tasks indicated that there were some strong feelings regarding the infrastructure in place in the school for Aboriginal students. Eight White participants (three teachers and five students) commented on the infrastructure in place for Aboriginal students.

Of these eight participants, five (two teachers and three students) reported that Aboriginal students receive too much extra support, and saw the system as "favouring" these students. Among these, two of three teachers agreed that Aboriginal students receive more than enough support within the school. For example, a teacher said:

> A lot is done for them, there's a breakfast program, there's a counselor that's just for the Native kids and there's one for each group of them, they don't even share one, they have separate ones, whereas the white kids, they don't have a breakfast program, they don't have a counselor...just an attendance

> counselor...so I think that...it's more than fair in regards to the service we provide.

Many White students used the term "taking advantage" to refer to what they perceive as the unfair advantages that Aboriginal students enjoy both at school and in society. Eleven participants used this terminology, mostly relating the advantages to money. Aboriginal students "get all this money from the government," "get more privileges such as money to go to school," "get a chance to go to university...and it's paid for," and "get everything for free."

Double Standards

I asked specific questions in the interviews and writing tasks regarding fair and equal treatment of students regardless of race. In the interview, I asked, "How would you describe your school in terms of fairness and equal treatment of all students?" And in the writing tasks I asked, "Are students ever treated differently by teachers, administration, or other students on the basis of their race? If so, in what way(s) are they treated differently?"

Four Aboriginal students and one teacher wrote about the existence of a double standard in the school that favours White students. Three of the four comments were about different standards and rules for White students, standards that were more lenient for these students. For example, one Aboriginal student wrote: "I feel that myself has been treated different because one of my teachers never let me go to the washroom all semester but she always let the white people come and go whenever they want."

Another Aboriginal student gave many examples of how Aboriginal students are treated unfairly. She wrote:

> Some teachers treat us different by ignoring us by letting other kids do good jobs when there are big group projects and give us the boring jobs. They talk to the other kids more and seem to come and talk to us only when we ask for help. They always watch us closer at lunchtime by walking around us to make sure we aren't up to no good. To me it seems like they are labeling us as bad kids.

A teacher shared this view as well: "There are some teachers that I've had problems with that I think are a little harder on Native students...my perception is some of them may have some biases that they should work on."

On the flip side, other participants noted that there is a double standard in the school that favours Aboriginal students. Most of these observations were related to behavioural or discipline issues, but five were related to academics. Common areas where students perceived that different rules or standards were being applied according to race were "leaving class," "skipping," "name calling," "lateness," "getting suspended," and "not doing work." Many of the participants used similar language to describe the situation, stating that in parallel situations, when there had been a rule infraction, "if a White student does this, there is one consequence, if an Aboriginal student does same thing, there is a different consequence." In particular, it was perceived by White participants that the consequences were more lenient for Aboriginal students.

Language used by White students to describe this preferential treatment of Aboriginal students included Aboriginal students being "favoured," certain behaviours being "overlooked," Aboriginal students "get away with" more or "get off easier." One White student wrote: "teachers and the principal favour natives better than us. They don't confront them if they are late or doing something wrong. They get free lunches sometimes." The free lunches refer to the additional support that is provided to Aboriginal students by their counselors. An Aboriginal student also acknowledged this

perception that Aboriginal students are treated differently: "I've heard people say, well, the native kids get off easy, native kids get this and they get that."

Two of the four teachers mentioned the double standard. One teacher said: "I've heard many, many complaints [from White students] that there's one code of behaviour for the Natives, and one code for [the White students] and [the White students] get slammed all the time and [the Aboriginal students] get away with a lot."

Five students said that the double standard among Aboriginal and White students relates to academic expectations and marking. One White student wrote:

> I find that students of a different race such as the aboriginal students get a lot of favouritism. The attendance counselor and teacher favour them by not expecting too much from them. And when they do their work it is a huge accomplishment and they don't get marked the same.

Twelve of 18 participants who discussed the double standard did not offer an explanation for it. Two students wrote that the reason for the double standard is that teachers are afraid of being accused of racism. One wrote: "In a lot of cases teachers are too afraid to upset certain students or to be called racist, just because they are trying to enforce rules in the classroom." Two White participants also mentioned that Aboriginal students are treated more leniently in order to try to keep them in school. One White student wrote: "Sometimes I think it's because half of them [Aboriginal students] don't even come to school, so the teachers try to keep the ones that actually come in school." A teacher discussed the issue of school retention but she also hinted at cultural disadvantage for Aboriginal students that needs to be taken into consideration when the school deals with behaviour issues:

> There is a very real perception that a blind eye is turned on many occasions for equal behaviours between Native and non-Native kids, and the reason is, let's

> just sort of say, we want you to come, we want you to be happy, we know that you have difficulties..."

One White student wrote that the double standard leads to tension between students of the two races: "Caucasian students being penalized for certain things that native students are not, such as chatting, or leaving class whenever, which sometimes leaves an unsettled feeling and tension between students." Another White student's reaction to the double standard that favours Aboriginal students revealed anger: "I just can't stand the way they get away with everything because they are different." And a third wrote that the double standard actually leads to racism: "The school should help us to stop racism by not favouring aboriginals. No breakfast made for them, no marking easier and have dances or youth group for everyone to be together." A teacher said in her interview that there are "constant complaints" about the issue by both teachers and students. She also said that "people have disagreements" about this issue.

One teacher said she thought that administration regarded itself as treating all students equally in this matter: "If you were to ask the question to administration, I'm sure they would probably say very guardedly, no, all students are treated equally, we expect the same codes of behaviour and we do deal with things." Administration may not be aware of that a popular perception exists that they treat students differently according to race, and the consequences of this perception.

Interracial Social Mixing in Student Body

In their writing tasks and interviews, students were asked how the races get along. Twenty-eight participants (five teachers and 23 students) commented on interracial social mixing in the student body. This is the fifth and final category under

the theme, the meaning of the current race relations situation. It includes the topics of interracial social mixing, extracurricular activities, and the inter-reserve divide.

Some participants (six of 28), one teacher, four White students, and one Aboriginal student, said that students do intermingle, that groups are "mixed." Four participants mentioned interracial dating as evidence that students do mix: "There are also couples, people dating, of different races, and this is not frowned upon."

Of the 28 participants who discussed interracial social mixing, 22 (five teachers and 17 students) said that students of different races do not mix. They used phrases like "people are divided," "separated," "don't mix," and "stick to their own friends." It appears, then, that most participants do not think that interracial social mixing is occurring in the student body.

Teachers agreed that students of different races do not mix. In response to my interview question, "Let's say I was a teacher at the school teaching a large and racially diverse class. What would I notice about how students interact with each other?" One teacher answered, "They sit in groups...if I had a group project they would choose people from their own community and stick to themselves." And another said, "They seem to be segregated and often it feels like it's something they choose."

Although most participants said that students of different races do not mix socially, two White students expressed regret over the split and wished things were different. According to one White student: "Different races don't really mix too well in our school. Which is really sad to see a split in our society." And another White student wrote, "I don't think that the races in our school mix. Although I would like them too."

Seven participants (two Aboriginal and five White) commented that it was the

Aboriginal students who chose to not mix with the White students. In her interview, a White student observed, "I notice a lot of Aboriginals, they stick together." Another White participant wrote: "The natives mainly shun the rest and sit in a confined corner to themselves or else stand together lining the hallways."

In her interview, one Aboriginal student said:

> Student: [At school] I would just hang around with the Natives...I wouldn't hang around with the White people. I wouldn't even make friends with them.
> Interviewer: And why is that?
> Student: Isolation, I guess so. I don't know, I guess I just wouldn't let myself be friends with them because I didn't like them.

Some participants noted that this lack of mixing could lead to racial tension and conflict. One teacher wrote, "visible minorities tend to socialize together" and adds that "sometimes this can lead to friction." Another teacher in her interview had a similar observation: "Our Native kids tend to be clustered together at one section [of lockers in the hallway] and some of the non-Native kids around those areas sometimes get into conflict."

Some participants offered explanations for the lack of mixing. One White student wrote that people don't mix because they don't know each other, and that for him, playing hockey was a way to make friends with people from a different community and background:

> My friends and I get along with the different groups because we played hockey with them, and got to know them. Everybody is like that; if you get to know them, then you get along and then soon you don't even think of each other as different.

Growing up, students may not have the opportunity to meet and make friends with others from a different community. It may not be until high school that they meet. By

high school, for many, it may be seen as a "natural" thing to socialize with people that you've always known.

In her interview, an Aboriginal student discussed why she stays with others from her community: "We want to do things together. Like if my friend doesn't make the basketball team, I'm not going to go because I don't want to be by myself. But I think that's just because they don't know anyone. No one to interact with." A teacher made a similar observation. When counseling students during course selection, this teacher has found that what is most important for some students is to have people from their community in the class with them: "they want to be in classes where they have some peers from their community of friends. So, in course selection, they wouldn't say what's that course about, they would say who's in that class."

One teacher attributed the lack of mixing to immature social skills. She said, "I think, though, perhaps it has to do with self esteem and not a willingness to open up or not an ability or perhaps a knowledge or skill to open up to others and they group together."

Extra-curricular Activities and Sports

Two teachers, one White student and one Aboriginal student commented on Aboriginal involvement in extra-curricular activities. One teacher and one White student noted that Aboriginal students had equal access to these activities; one teacher and one Aboriginal student said they didn't have equal access but were at a disadvantage. One teacher said, "Sports programs...[are] as equally available to our Natives as to our non-Native kids" while another teacher asserts that Aboriginal students faced a

disadvantage because they lived "so far from the school so for them to partake in extracurricular activities it's very difficult."

Inter-Reserve Divide

Not only was a divide noted between White and Aboriginal students in the high school, but seven participants discussed a divide between students from the two different reserves that attend the high school. To describe this divide, participants used words such as the two groups "don't get along" (3), they "group" together (2), and others said that there were "problems," "tensions," and even "conflicts," and "a number of crises." One White student had this perspective on the division:

> In our school, I believe there are two primary groups, the Natives and the White people. However there [is] also a divide between the Natives. There is the [Reserve A] natives and the [Reserve B] Natives. These two do not get along...Nobody gets along with the [Reserve B] Natives...

Some participants discussed reasons for this divide, saying that students from one of the reserves are seen as "less polished," and "poorer" than students of the other reserve. It would appear that students from that reserve seem to be considered at the bottom of the social hierarchy at the school. Teachers noted that students from the two reserves often will not sit together in class: "[Reserve A students] sat on this side of the class, and [Reserve B students] sat on that side of the class..."

Manifestations of Racism

This theme describes verbal and physical manifestations of racism at the school, stereotyping of Aboriginal students, racial conflicts between females and specific racial

incidents.

Verbal Manifestations of Racism

Within the school, participants reported a variety of verbal manifestations of racism, including racial name-calling or slurs, racial jokes, and stereotypes. Verbal manifestations of racism is the first category within the theme of manifestations of racism.

Racial Name-Calling and Slurs

Eleven participants, including one teacher, four Aboriginal students and six White students, reported that racial name-calling occurs at school. Nine students (three Aboriginal and six White) discussed specific slurs targeting Aboriginal students and White students. Participants mentioned six different specific slurs, four to name Aboriginal people, and two to name White people. For Aboriginal students: "Bogan,"[7] "those dirty Indians," "stupid Indian," and "savage;" For White students: "White trash" and "Whitey."

Six Aboriginal students commented on name-calling and slurs in interviews and writing tasks. Two of these six related to specific instances of when this had happened at school and when they themselves were the targets of such slurs. One Aboriginal student's story illustrated this experience:

> ...they [a group of White students] didn't know I was right behind them....and they're like, 'Oh we'd better turn around, those dirty Indians are down the hall.'
> And I was like, 'What did you say?'
> 'Dirty Indians.'
> 'I'm an Indian.'
> And then I started a conflict...

In terms of who is doing the name-calling, or making slurs, it seems that both groups are. One White student wrote:

> There are many Aboriginal students in this school and I know that people constantly single them out and sometimes use racial slurs when referring to them, but I also know that Aboriginal students do the same to everyone else.

An Aboriginal student agreed, writing that "there is some racial comments made about all different races." A teacher agreed, first citing examples of White students using slurs, then stating: "I wouldn't say that the native population is any more innocent. They pick their own fights and they use racial slurs to heighten the tension."

Three participants noted that name-calling can be a spark that leads to racial incidents. A teacher noted that

> ...there have been physical outbursts between students and a lot of them have been racially provoked. They start off with slurs, and then, OK, white man, stand up to me, or OK, and it escalates from there and results in violence.

One phrase that recurred when students spoke or wrote about racial comments was "behind our/their backs." This phrase came up eight times and was used by both Aboriginal and White students equally to describe where many of these verbal manifestations of racism occur. What are the things being said? Students reported "they talk about us behind our backs," make "racial comments", tell "White jokes" or "Native jokes," and so on. One Aboriginal student wrote: "Everyone interacts with each other in a pleasant manner. But when they aren't with each other, there are racial comments made behind their backs. White jokes, Native jokes, comments are made." Another Aboriginal student commented: "I know there's a lot of people who won't say stuff to my face but will say it behind my back." A White student wrote: "Everyone talks

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7 A racial slur for an Aboriginal person.

behind their backs, they would never have the guts to say it to your face."

Racial Jokes

Another verbal manifestation of racism is racial jokes. Two teachers, four White students and three Aboriginal students made reference to jokes. Two of the White students and one of the teachers characterized this as "joking around" and not something that was hurtful or negative. A teacher said:

> I see kids teasing one another, oh you're a Bogan or you're a...whatever the Natives call White kids and they're both laughing, and they're throwing insults back and forth but they're jostling and having fun, and they all look like they're totally amused by the whole thing and then they go off to class...And I would say that goes on a lot.

A White student discussed this also and wrote:

> I don't think this is a major problem. It is a problem but most people just do it as a joke and the person DOES understand. I'm White and my best friend is a Native. We always joke around calling each other names. He calls me Stupid White Boy and I call him Stupid Brownie. We are just kidding around and we don't let it bother us. It's called a joke and some people just need to get a sense of humour.

The other participants who reported joke-telling characterized the joking as hurtful, however. An Aboriginal student gave another perspective on this issue of joking and teasing:

> When I hear people talking to me they sometimes joke about my Native background, because all of my friends are Caucasians, and I am kind of the odd man out. Whenever they joke they do not mean to hurt my feelings, but rather just to bring humour to our group. This does not bother me a whole lot. But sometimes they can go overboard and make one to [sic] many jokes about me and that does bother me. When this happens I try to ignore or just go do something else with other people.

Clearly, although some people perceive that this joking is harmless, it does have power to hurt.

Stereotypes

The second category under the theme of manifestations of racism was stereotypes. Participants in the interviews were asked if people in the school hold racial stereotypes, and if so, how could they tell. All interview participants agreed that racial stereotypes exist. Many went on to discuss some of the stereotypes that exist, and sixteen specific stereotypes emerged in the data analysis. All of the racial stereotypes identified by participants targeted Aboriginal people, and all but one were reports of others holding the stereotypes, as opposed to the participant holding the stereotype him or herself.

Stereotypes of Aboriginal people were varied, and included stereotypes of students as well as people in general. Student stereotypes included the following: "Aboriginal students skip," "Aboriginal students are low achievers," "Aboriginal students are poor." The most popular general stereotypes for Aboriginal people involved violence and drinking. Others included, "Aboriginal people freeload," "Aboriginal people do drugs," and "Aboriginal people are rough." One White participant's comment held an embedded stereotype: "Considering our town has two native reserves, I think that violence is kept to a minimum."

Overcoming Stereotypes

In a writing task, one White student acknowledged that stereotypes exist, but that one way to overcome them is for people to get to know each other and discover that the stereotypes are not true.

> Many people feel threatened by the First Nation students because they have been stereotyped as rough, strong, mean individuals, I felt this way when I was

> younger, before I actually was around first nation students. Now, after being in school with them I view them the same as myself. I feel a lot of other students feel this way as well.

According to this student, one way to get rid of stereotypes is to have students get to know one another and find out that the group image is not true.

During the focus group interview with the White students, there was the discussion of a stereotype and an interrogation of it. The group of students appeared to feel free and safe to discuss it. One student put forth a stereotype and questioned it:

> Student 1: There was...this deal, that the first month or so of the rent you could have [the house you'd rented] for free, and then there was these Aboriginals that came to rent it and then when that month was over they left. So they...just took advantage of the deal. And is it that all of them take advantage?
> Student 2: White people would do that too.
> Student 3: I'd probably do that!
> (Laughter)
> Student 2: It has nothing to do with race. That's people.

The feedback from the group provided a means for this student to question her stereotype of Aboriginal people.

Physical Manifestations of Racism

Physical manifestations of racism was the third category within the theme of manifestations of racism. Physical manifestations of racism were reported much less frequently than verbal ones. A common scenario that did emerge in the data was physical contact in the hallways; ten participants (one teacher, two Aboriginal students and seven White students) mentioned it. The most common descriptors of this behaviour was "pushing" and "bumping." One White student wrote: "Some people that are of a different race get along, while others have resorted to calling each other names

and pushing each other in the halls."

Both Aboriginal students and White students were identified as initiators of the physical contact; Aboriginal students identified White students as initiators, and White students identified Aboriginal students as initiators.

As with name-calling, pushing and bumping can escalate situations that are already tense, reported five participants. One wrote: "Sometimes there will be a few coarse words thrown back after an argument or after a bump in the hallway."

Conflicts as Personality Clashes Rather than Racism

Five participants (four White and one Aboriginal) discussed their perception that conflicts between students of different racial backgrounds were more often personality clashes than racism. One teacher characterized these conflicts as "little quibble(s) between 14-year-olds" and another teacher said "I would generalize it into teenagers, and teenagers have mood swings and dramas in their lives and I'm not sure how big race plays in it overall." A White student wrote: "Students in this school pretty much get along, but those who don't , don't because of reasons other than race." Some at the school viewed conflicts as personality clashes rather than racism.

Female Racial Conflicts

During the course of the interviews, six participants (five White and one Aboriginal) stated that it was females who had the most racial conflicts. One teacher noted, "we tend to have issues between females more than males for some reason." Female racial conflicts emerged as the fourth category within the theme of manifestations of racism.

Some participants offered explanations for these conflicts. For instance, one White student said that there were interracial conflicts between girls rather than boys "because [a girl] might feel more insecure and she feels like she has to put her foot down whenever there's something wrong and...it might be...violent." A teacher commented that there were: "Lots of...teen girl issues...Jealousies between our Native girls and some of the tall skinny long blonde hair types, Barbie doll types, we do see that kind of thing, it's a physical appearance motivation."

A few of the participants said that Aboriginal girls were perceived as tough and intimidating. A female Aboriginal student related the following story:

> I stayed after school one day and I was hanging around with some of the Marathon people and there was a young boy...fourteen or fifteen years old... who seemed to be more intimidated by the female natives than the natives. ...he just came up to us and said I would be more scared of the Indian girls than the Indian boys because of how strong the girls are.

A White student spoke of an experience where he had been the victim of some aggression from a group of Aboriginal girls: "I've had some native girls trying to hit me because I bumped into them."

Stories of Positive Race Relations

The fifth and final category within the theme of manifestations of racism was specific racial incidents. Four participants discussed examples of positive race relations within the school. Three were related by White students and were about positive race relations among students and the other was related by an Aboriginal student and was about positive race relations between teachers and students. No questions were specifically asked about positive race relations; rather, I asked simply about "race

relations" and did not specifically denote either negative or positive relations.

One White student wrote about an exchange student who had come from Japan and attended the high school for a year. This student said, "Students here seemed to take this individual under their wings. He was treated with dignity and respect and students seemed interested in learning about his culture." He added, "There were, of course, those who would make a racial remark when they saw him."

Other examples focused on Aboriginal/White relations. Two students discussed their Aboriginal friends and described how they get along well; they interpreted this as an example of how members of the two racial groups can get along.

An Aboriginal student discussed several teachers and "a lot of" TA's" who were showing an interest in Aboriginal culture: "I find there's a bunch of teachers trying to get involved in our ways" and went on to discuss two teachers in particular. This was seen as positive and a way to improve the race relations situation. Said the student, "I guess if they do learn about it, it will better it up, 'cause they'll know more."

Teachers' Experiences with Race Relations

This theme focuses on teachers' unique experiences with race relations at the school. The data were classified under the category of teaching Aboriginal students. Issues raised include contrasting approaches to teaching a diverse class, absenteeism, and teaching a Native Studies course as White persons.

Teaching A Diverse Class

Of the three of the teachers I interviewed, all commented on how they teach a diverse class. Two contrasting approaches emerged: treating all students the same,

regardless of race, and recognizing differences and taking differing racial backgrounds into account when teaching. Two of the teachers said they treat all of their students the same. For example, one teacher stated, "I really don't care what their outer packaging is...I don't find that whenever I go into a classroom, I go, OK, you guys are Native and so I'm going to look at you differently, or [have] different assumptions."

Another teacher said that while he treats students the same, he also takes into account their different racial backgrounds. He explained, "to me everyone is the same, so they come into the class, and to me it doesn't matter where they come from, they're students in the classroom." He went on to say, however, that Aboriginal students face several disadvantages that are unique to their group, including geographic location, access to extra help, and support from home.

Absenteeism

One issue that was mentioned in relation to, but not exclusively to, Aboriginal students is absenteeism. I discussed this issue earlier in terms of the stereotype that is held that Aboriginal students skip classes. The blanket assertion that all Aboriginal students do this is what makes it a stereotype. Still, it was acknowledged by several teachers that many Aboriginal students do indeed skip often. This trend, identified by three teachers, has some unfortunate consequences. A teacher said that when she assigns students to work in groups, often tension arises because those who skip class don't do their share of the work: "I know there was a lot of frustration. Sometimes White kids against minority and sometimes minority against minority because of poor attendance." She acknowledged in her statement not a stereotype, but a real problem

that can lead to interracial and interpersonal tensions.

Non-Aboriginal Teachers Teaching a Native Studies Class

The school offers a Native Studies course called "Aboriginal Beliefs, Values and Aspirations in Contemporary Society." As there are no Aboriginal teachers at the school, a White person teaches this course. Teacher participants had opinions about teaching this course. Two teachers said that they felt unqualified to teach this course as a White person. One said, "As a White person, is it really my place to say, you know, this is how it was done, this is how the White people wrote in the book that it was done." A teacher commented that the students themselves feel that it is inappropriate for a White person to teach the course: "[The students] look at a White person and they say, well why are you teaching native students?" All three teachers expressed discomfort at the thought of teaching the course, but said they would deal with it if assigned the job.

School Responses to Race Relations Situation

The fourth and final theme of the study focuses on the school's responses to race relations. The two categories within this theme were the school's present response to race relations issues and what schools should do to address racism.

School's Present Response to Race Relations Issues

This section describes the school's present response to race relations issues. It is divided into two subsections: the school board policy, and the school's strategies.

Policy

To respond to race relations issues, the high school follows an anti-racism policy mandated by the school board called "Handling Racial Incidents." This policy states that the board "condemns and refuses to tolerate any derogatory expression of racial/ethnic bias in any form by its students, staff, trustees, volunteers or any community group using Board facilities."

The policy outlines a basic procedure to be followed when handling racial incidents: "It is important that anyone witnessing a racial/ethnic incident report it immediately to the Principal" and "School staff who witness a racial incident must intervene immediately." After that, a meeting is to be arranged with the offending student and his or her parent(s) or guardian(s) if a problem is not resolved. After this meeting, if there is another incident, the student "may be withdrawn for one day or suspended at the Principal's discretion." The policy states, "further incidents will result in longer suspensions."

School Strategies

Teachers and students commented and wrote about the school's present response to race relations in writing tasks and interviews. All of the teachers interviewed said that they bring concerns to administration. Other responses from teachers included a "zero tolerance" policy, where "people were asked to leave – no exceptions." Two teachers said that they preferred to address problems as they come up in class and discuss them, or they will address issues with one of the Aboriginal attendance counselors: "A lot of teachers go to [the counselor] just as a sidetrack through administration; it's not always necessary to take every issue to administration."

Two teachers spoke of using racial incidents or comments as a springboard to explore racial issues with the class, and to use these incidents as "teachable moments."

Teachers were asked how comfortable they feel in dealing with racial issues. Of the four interviewed, one said "comfortable," with the remaining three using these words to describe their comfort levels: "not very comfortable," uncomfortable," "not my choice of things to talk about," and that dealing with these issues was "very unpleasant."

The teacher who felt comfortable said it was due to extensive experience dealing with these issues. The reasons for feeling uncomfortable included feeling responsible for injustice to Aboriginal people, being non-confrontational by nature, and feeling that "the charges are always blown out of proportion." Some teachers commented that racial issues are difficult to deal with.

In terms of the school's treatment of general race relations issues, rather than specific incidents, 13 different strategies were mentioned. These included an Anti-Racism day, Anti-Racism stickers, media shows, and special workshops. Three participants discussed what is not done, and mentioned that there are no school assemblies, that they've never heard it directly talked about at school, and that there is no professional development associated with it.

Although these comments were not specifically solicited, it is interesting to note that four students offered critiques of the school's activities on Anti-Racism Day, March 21. One student commented that the school doesn't do enough to publicize the event: "A bunch of us didn't even know it was that day until it was last period." Another student said that it was not well organized, and another said that students don't understand what the day is all about.

Police

One way the school administration deals with racist incidents is to call the police. Four participants, two teachers and two students (one Aboriginal and one White), mentioned this. Three incidents were discussed which involved police coming to the school. Police are involved when an incident is more serious. One teacher commented, "if it appears that we need to call in the police because it's a serious charge or it's over harassment or sexual harassment, or reached a physical dimension, then we have to respond accordingly." She continued:

> As soon as there's even a suggestion that somebody may have made a racial statement or a racially motivated action, that's jumped on with high seriousness, and everything, everything is taken into account. To the point where on numerous occasions we've had our local police officers come in and be part of our investigations just so that we can clear terms of harassment or charges of harassment.

A teacher discussed one incident where there was "a student last year who was wrestled to the floor and handcuffed by police." One student mentioned that having police involvement can help a situation: "going to the police, I think it helps."

What School Should Do About Race Relations

Thirty-three participants offered practical suggestions for ways the school should deal with race relations. See Table 2 for a summary of these suggestions.

Table 2: Participants' Suggestions for Dealing with Racism

Type of Suggestion	Actual Comment
More Communication: Presentations	They should have more presentations in removing racism from the school (White student).
	Maybe there could be a presentation that the entire school could watch every year (White student).

	School should have a presentation to make [students] fully understand that it is wrong (White student).
More Communication: Assembly	A major assembly should be held. This way we can try to get across to racist individuals that it is hurtful and wrong (White student).
More Communication: Discuss it	Get together groups to discuss this matter (White student).
	To address racism, school should discuss it within the classroom. This should be done several times throughout the year (White student).
	I think school should definitely talk to all students about racism [and inform them] on the consequences of being racist at school. I'm sure it really hurts some people and kids in the school should know they should be able to talk to someone about it (White student).
	Talk about it and be more informed on the issue.
Strong Punishment	Address the problem by finding out who has the racism against whoever and expel the parties involved (Aboriginal student).
	School should be more strict on punishment and equal when it comes to students being punished for racism (Aboriginal student).
	Any one being racist should get a suspension and have to write a 1000 word essay on why racism is wrong and why they shouldn't do it or have them do a small project (Aboriginal student).
	They should make a stronger punishment system for any racist in school (White student).
	School should have a no tolerance policy for racial issues (White student).
Special Days: Multicultural Days	School should have multicultural days to spread awareness of the different cultures (White student).
	Have a day where they show different races, where they came from that their not all what the stereotypes make them out to

	be (White student).
Special Days: Interactive Fun Days	The school could encourage more interactive fun days during school to ease racial tension, the fun days will bring the students closer together (White student).
Special Days: Anti-Racism Day	Support anti-racism day wholeheartedly (White student).
Exposure to Others	Expose students through direct contact with students of other cultures in our own country and through international travel (White teacher).
	Get people with different races to interact with each other more often. By getting people with different races to interact with each other, they might see that the other race is not as bad as they thought and maybe start to treat them as equals (Aboriginal student).
Training: Special Course	Racism is only a manifestation of something bigger. What we need inside the school is a curriculum which includes a full course/program in ethics and manners. If we had this, we would have people sensitized to the needs of others (White teacher).
	Make people aware of what racism is and how it affects students by setting up programs, teaching it in classes (Aboriginal student).
Training: Cultural Sensitivity Training	All of us, teachers and students included, could use some cultural sensitivity training (White teacher).
Deal with it in Elementary School	It should start at a younger age, like in primary school...in high school, people are pretty set in their ways (White student).

Participants' suggestions can be grouped into several different categories. They are: more communication, strong punishment, special days, training, exposure, and deal with it in elementary school. The category of more communication includes presentations, assemblies, and discussions. The category of strong punishment

includes suggestions for consequences of racist behaviour. The category of special days includes multicultural days, interactive fun days and anti-racism days. Suggestions about training included special courses and cultural sensitivity training. Exposure to others included providing opportunities for direct contact between different racial groups. Finally, one participant suggested dealing with the problem in elementary school.

The largest sub-group of suggestions was to have more communication around racism. Three participants mentioned presentations specifically. Indeed, many participants expressed a desire to have racism brought into the open, wanting to talk about it in a discussion group, or within the classroom, or have an assembly about it.

The second largest sub-group of suggestions was "having a strong punishment for racism." Five students gave this suggestion, and four of these five students were Aboriginal.

One student expressed concern about open communication about racism, saying that more open discussion of racism could lead to more racism: "Schools should address racism as it comes up and should discourage it. If there aren't problems with people being racist in the school it shouldn't be brought up, it might encourage people to make racist comments just to get attention."

Other suggestions included having multicultural days, having an Anti-Racism day, offering students a course on ethics and manners, having cultural sensitivity training, and dealing with the issue in elementary school. Two participants wanted to see students exposed to other cultures through direct contact.

Eight participants mentioned things the school should not do to address race

relations. Three of them said that the school should not address the issue in a special course. This was in response to an interview question that asked, "What is your opinion of requiring students to take a class designed to teach about the histories, cultures, achievements, and problems of minority youth?" One student said that having a "Native day" is not a good idea, nor is March 21st, the Anti-Racism day that the school currently observes. Two students said that the school should reduce racism by treating all students fairly, pointing back to the hard feelings surrounding the perceived double standard.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

In this section, I discuss the findings and interpretation. The discussion follows the order set out in the last chapter, that is, following the four different themes that emerged in the study: meaning of the current race relations situation; manifestations of racism; teachers' experiences with race relations; and school responses to the race relations situation.

Meaning of the Current Race Relations Situation

Within the first theme of the study, meaning of the current race relations, I discuss definitions of racism, personal language when defining racism, and the question of whether non-Whites can be racist. I examine the perceptions that race relations at the school are fine; race relations as a subject does not come up often in school, and that the setting is not diverse. I also discuss the perception that Aboriginal students have an unfair advantage at school, and look at fair and equal treatment. Finally, I explore the lack of interracial social mixing, access to extra-curricular activities and sports, and the inter-reserve divide.

Defining Racism

That participants provided several definitions of racism is not surprising. As discussed in the literature review, racism is a very difficult concept to define. Indeed, "racism is so expansive, with such an array of meanings from context to context that it no longer has a meaning in the conventional sense of a single, commonly understood definition" (Fleras & Elliott, 1999, p. 68).

In this study, participants defined racism as individual racism, that is, "personal attitudes or actions that prejudge or discriminate on the basis of race" (Haluza-Delay, 2002, p. 47). None of the participants included systemic or cultural racism in their definitions. This is significant because defining racism only in its individual form could mean that participants have not considered the other forms of racism, systemic racism and cultural racism, and how they may or may not come into play at the school.

I found that most participants defined racism as something negative that causes harm. Some participants, both White and Aboriginal, teachers and students, characterized racism as something that was neutral or could even be positive. This definition of racism points to a potentially harmful misunderstanding of the concept by some students and teachers. Racism by its nature is hurtful and serious to its victims. Saying that racism is "different" treatment or could be positive could have the effect of trivializing the experience of racism.

Personal Language in Definitions

Just under half of the definitions of racism provided by Aboriginal participants contained personal pronouns to identify the victim of racism. White participants' definitions of racism contained no personal pronouns for the victim. These definitions were less personal, and described racism as something that happened to "people", or a "group." As I note in the next section, are not in the victim role where racism is concerned. Therefore it makes sense that White participants would define racism as something that happens to someone else.

Can Non-Whites Be Racist?

When defining racism, several participants, both White and Aboriginal said that anyone could be racist. This view recurred in other parts of the data and presents an interesting point that is important to explore. Eight participants, six White and two Aboriginal, indicated that Aboriginal students were racist toward White students. Wrote one White student: "I do notice that some Natives push others around and are racist towards us" and another said, "I think that the aboriginal peoples are the biggest providers of racism." Four participants (three White and one Aboriginal) explained it in this way: there is racism against Aboriginal students but there is also racism against White students.

An understanding of racism that allows anyone to be racist is based on an understanding that racism is prejudice or discrimination against any another group. This is a widely held definition of racism in society (Tatum, 1997, p. 10). A more radical, and I believe, more accurate definition of racism considers which groups hold power in a society and how that power can be used to disadvantage and even oppress other groups. In Canadian society, White people are the ones that hold this power. Peggy McIntosh (1998) explores the idea of unearned privileges that White people enjoy. She argues that the fact of being White affords a certain power that non-Whites do not share: "I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day" (p. 94). Most Whites, McIntosh argues, are not conscious of these privileges that they enjoy, yet they benefit from them daily.

As Wellman (in Tatum, 1997, p. 7) points out that racism can be understood as "a system of advantage based on race." This means that in order for people to be

racist, they must belong to the advantaged or privileged group. Tatum believes that only White people, who are the privileged group, have the power to be racist in our society. Tatum argues:

> In my view, reserving the term racist only for behaviours committed by Whites in the context of a White-dominated society is a way of acknowledging the ever-present power differential afforded Whites by the culture and institutions that make up the system of advantage and continue to support notions of White superiority (p. 10).

According to this definition of racism as a system of advantage based on race, non-Whites cannot accurately be called racist in our society, since it is not their group that holds the privileged status and enjoys the unearned benefits. For example, a slur used by a non-White person toward a White person does not do the same kind of damage because, as Fleras and Elliott (1999) write, "Minorities lack the institutional power to put bigotry into practice in a way that stings" (p. 71).

So, another way of understanding student responses, which state that Aboriginal students are racist towards Whites, would be that they display negative or destructive behaviours towards White students, but that they are not in fact displaying racism. They may instead be reacting to a system that puts them at a disadvantage in society.

One teacher, when commenting on whether she had witnessed racism at school, said: "Yes, I have. I haven't seen racism from a White student to a...Native student; it's been the other way around. I often see the Native kids being very aggressive, saying very inappropriate things or being confrontational." This teacher interpreted racism as a behaviour that can be initiated by any group and can target any other group.

An alternate interpretation of the same situation could be that Aboriginal students, in the social context of the school, are reacting to a system that disadvantages

them and this is the source of their "racism" and not a prejudice against White people. One White student hinted at this possibility when she wrote:

> From my point of view, white students look down upon native students...But I also notice racism against white students, some native people think white students think they are better than native students for reasons like more money i.e. parents have better jobs, house car, etc.

This student suggested a reason why Aboriginal students may act with antagonism toward White students; they are reacting to the injustice of White students' superior status in society. As discussed in the introduction, White people on average enjoy a higher economic status than Aboriginal people and enjoy more power and advantage in Canadian society (Dussault, 2000).

Perception That Race Relations are Fine

Most respondents reported that race relations in the school were fine. However racist incidents, stereotypes, racist jokes, and fights had occurred at the school.

A few explanations could be offered for the general perception that, according to many, things were okay. Amanda Lewis' (2001) study of race relations in a high school found that race was downplayed and trivialized. Race was seen by some as a taboo subject, and therefore was not talked about. If so, this reflects the larger context of Canadian society. As discussed in the introduction, Canada may appear to be a tolerant and racist-free society, where all people are assured equal rights. However, the reality shows a different picture, one that includes individual, systemic and cultural racism (Alexander, 2000). This same paradox could be in evidence at the school.

In the literature review, I noted that teacher and student perceptions of race relations can differ greatly. Lewis (2001) and Schofield (1997) both found that teachers

tended to perceive race as unimportant while students perceived it as significant. I did not find this to be true in my study. Rather, teacher and student perceptions generally were similar. The distinction that arose was that only teachers described race relations as an undercurrent that "flares up" from time to time and then is dealt with.

Racism Does Not Come Up Often

Most teachers and students agreed that the topic of racism does not come up often at school. It is difficult to interpret this topic because the frequency with which the topic of racism is raised may not be a reliable indicator of the severity of racism at the school. It is interesting that no participants could say that the topic of racism never arose; it is thus likely safe to assume that it is talked about, at least occasionally. Even if racism came up every day at school, that may not necessarily indicate that it was a problem; it could be discussed and interrogated daily to ensure that it is less of a problem. Conversely, if racism never came up at school, it may not indicate that there are no problems; it may just mean no one talks about them.

Setting Not Perceived as Diverse

It is significant that some White participants do not regard their community as being racially diverse. Granted, there are not a great number of visible minority groups in the area, but in saying their community is not diverse, these White participants seem to deny the distinct status of Aboriginal people and other visible minorities. Some participants claimed that knowing Aboriginal people makes them less likely to be racist towards them. Thomas Dunk's (1991) study discussed this idea. He found that even though Aboriginal people were personal friends of White participants, Whites still held prejudicial attitudes towards Aboriginals. Knowing people of a different race does not

then necessarily mean racism is reduced.

It is not surprising that some participants mentioned the fact that racism exists in the larger community as well as in the school. The community influences the nature of race relations in the school, a finding consistent with Harper's (1997) claim that because racism exists in society it must exist in schools (p. 201).

Perceived Unfair Advantage for Aboriginal Students

The comments of 11 White students that Aboriginal students enjoy unfair advantages both at school and in society suggest that some White participants do not think that Aboriginal students should have special support at school. This perception might exist because these participants may not be aware of the reasons for special support. When I spoke to both of the school counselors for Aboriginal students about the support in place for Aboriginal students, they discussed the fact that in the past, before these special supports were in place, the drop-out rate for Aboriginal students was much higher. The programs in place for Aboriginal students are helping them finish school. Others have found that this strategy of providing extra support to minority students helps to enhance their engagement and achievement in school (Tatum, 2003, p. 71). Perhaps if others in the school knew this, and why the programs are needed specifically for Aboriginal students, there would be more support for these programs.

The common perception among White students that Aboriginal students are recipients of money also points to a certain understanding of special supports that are in place for Aboriginal people in Canadian society. These White students are probably referring to the fact that Aboriginal students receive financial assistance from their band administration for postsecondary education. As in the case of the school, it would be

helpful if these students knew why these programs are in place.

Fair and Equal Treatment

One major topic that emerged in the study was the view of several White participants (both students and teachers) that there is a double standard in the way in which the school administration deals with Aboriginal students.

The literature review revealed that teachers sometimes treat minority students differently, thus putting them at a disadvantage (Aviles, Guerrero, Howarth and Thomas, 1999; Ryan, 1998). In this study only four Aboriginal students perceived that they were were disadvantaged. Many more (15) White respondents said that there was not equal and fair treatment of all students. It was Aboriginal students who had the advantage, according to these students, while White students were at a disadvantage.

In interpreting this phenomenon, it is important to distinguish between equal treatment and fair treatment. Equal treatment means everyone is being treated in exactly the same way. Fair treatment means just treatment. Fair treatment does not necessarily mean equal treatment. While school administration may not treat Aboriginal students and White students equally, one must ask if their treatment is fair. Perhaps the administration recognizes that this group faces disadvantage in the school and is trying to mitigate this by being more flexible with rules and consequences. One teacher interviewed hinted at this: "I think it's fair. I think the administration is conscious of the racial groups and I think they do their best to make sure everything is fair."

Aboriginal students face disadvantages in school that White students do not, such as stereotyping (Ponting, 1998). Perhaps the administration is taking these types of factors into account when dealing with Aboriginal students, trying to make things

fairer for this group.

The double standard that many White participants perceived could actually worsen racial tensions among students. White students, if treated differently, and if in their view, unfairly, based on their race, may feel resentment toward Aboriginal students because they are able to do things that White students cannot. They may feel resentful also toward teachers and administration for maintaining the double standard.

Four Aboriginal students reported that they felt that a double standard was in place that favoured White students. This also could lead to misunderstandings and resentments, and should be investigated.

Lack of Interracial Social Mixing

In my study, most participants reported that students of different races do not mix. This lack of mixing may be a high school phenomenon. In high school, students are looking for identity, and group and peers become extremely important to help explore identity (Tatum, 1997). As one White participant explained: "When I came to high school, I noticed the people were divided into different groups like the natives were with the natives, preps were with the preps, and the nerds were with the nerds." It seems that cliques form around different group identities, and this student saw the Aboriginal students as one of those cliques.

Tatum (1997) discusses this issue of mixing versus separating in her book *Why are all the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* She discusses the fact that, in grade school, usually children of all races mix socially. By high school, though, "walk into any racially mixed high school cafeteria at lunch time and you will instantly notice that in the sea of adolescent faces, there is an identifiable group of Black students

sitting together" (p. 52). She discusses the exploration of identity in which adolescents typically engage. Race is an important dimension of identity that particularly non-White adolescents explore since they are different from the dominant culture: "researchers have found that adolescents of colour are more likely to be actively engaged in an exploration of their racial or ethnic identity than are White students" (p. 53). When they encounter racism whether it be in the form of discrimination, stereotypes, slurs or jokes, find support not from their White peers who do not share their experiences, but from their peers of the same race: "joining with one's peers for support in the face of stress is a positive coping strategy" (p. 62).

Access to Extra-Curricular Activities and Sports

Among the four participants who discussed Aboriginal participation in extra-curricular activities and sports, half said that all had equal access to these activities, and the other half said that access was not equal.

While the school offers these activities to all, there is a disadvantage to those who live a distance from the school, and many of these students happen to be Aboriginal. Aviles, Guerrero, Howarth and Thomas' (1999) study found that minority involvement in extra-curricular activities was important in student engagement and achievement. Since the consequences of non-participation in extra-curricular activities might be significant and data in this area were limited, this topic deserves further investigation.

Why is there an Inter-Reserve Divide?

Seven participants noted that there is a divide between students from the two different reserves that attend the high school. The students from the two reserves have

different group identities. One reserve is poorer and more rural, and is sent to have lower status. Not surprisingly, perhaps, these students stay together. Tatum (1997) discusses different aspects of identity: "Who we perceive as sharing our identity may be influenced by other dimensions of identity such as...geographical location" (p. 70). In addition, bell hooks (2000) argues that economic status, or class, can compound the effect of racism and must be taken into account when addressing it (p. 161).

The case here of one reserve being more marginalized than the other due to the intersection of race, class and geographic area factors is another area where further research would be beneficial.

Manifestations of Racism

The second theme of the study is manifestations of racism. In this section, I discuss implications of racial name-calling, slurs and jokes, and implications of stereotypes. I explore the issue of hallway pushing and bumping, and the question of whether certain incidents are personality clashes rather than racism. I offer an interpretation of female racial conflicts, and finally, I examine the stories provided of positive race relations.

Racial Name-calling, Slurs and Jokes

Eleven participants reported racial name-calling and slurs, and nine participants reported racial jokes. The school board defines a racial incident as "slurs, name calling, jokes, [and] teasing." The incidents discussed by participants clearly fit under this

category, and yet I found that some are tolerated practices within the school. It seems that there is a perception among a few White students and teachers that racial joke telling and slurs are acceptable forms of humour. Aboriginal participants did not share this perception, and found this form of humour to be hurtful.

Racial jokes and slurs are not harmless. They point to the individual's perception of the target group and they also reinforce stereotypes and prejudices: "Individuals verbalize or demonstrate their racist beliefs and attitudes in racial jokes. They do so not only by telling the joke, but also by participating in the process of constructing Others" (James, 2003, p. 152).

In addition, racial joking and slurs poison an environment, making it an oppressive place for those who are targeted by the jokes. The Ontario Human Rights Code identifies the telling of racist jokes and using slurs as a violation of the code, and states that even one joke or comment can contribute to a 'poisoned environment': "a single incident or racially-based comment can create a 'poisoned environment' for the persons affected" (OHRC, 1996, p. 3). This environment puts the affected people at a disadvantage, and that constitutes a violation of the Ontario Human Rights Code.

Kailin (1999) found that teachers' perceptions influence how they interpret and respond to racism. This study confirmed that teachers' perceptions of what racism is determine how they would react to certain behaviours. People who tolerate racial joking send the message that this type of humour is acceptable, despite the school board policy's clear statement that racial jokes are not to be tolerated.

The phrase that was commonly used "behind our/their backs" may point to the issue of racism as being a socially unacceptable topic. People know that it is taboo to

be racist, and so they are not openly so, but rather racist things are said "behind our backs" rather than "to our faces." This language also reveals that groups of students of different races may be wary or suspicious of one another. This may add to the divide between students.

Implications of Stereotypes

All interview participants mentioned that stereotypes exist in the school. What impact can stereotypes have? Ryan (1998) discusses the impact that teacher-held stereotypes can have on minority student achievement levels. He found that if teachers had lower expectations of minority students, this would impact their teaching and affect minority student achievements. Dei (1996) found in his study of Black students' perspectives on school racism that students felt some teachers had low expectations of them. In her interview, an Aboriginal student discussed an incident of lower expectations for Aboriginal students: "he [the teacher] would not pay attention to the Natives because [he] thinks they're just not coming and [he] won't see them the next day. And all Natives are not like that." This student felt that in this class, Aboriginal students were treated differently because of the stereotype the teacher held that Aboriginal students skip. Three teachers agreed that there are stereotypes at play in the classroom. Fleras and Elliot (1999) state, "For minorities, stereotyping is a problem. Each negative image or unflattering representation reinforces their peripheral position within an unequal society" (p. 74). Stereotypes keep their targets marginalized.

Rick Ponting (1998) discusses the impact of stereotyping Aboriginal peoples in

his essay, "Racism and Stereotyping First Nations." With stereotyping, he says, "great harm is done to Native people, especially to their identity" (p. 279). He contends that stereotypes can lead to negative self-identity, changing the way people think of themselves for the worse. Stereotyping, he argues, also can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy:

> Among the many reasons the high school drop out/push out rates of First Nation students is that teachers and non-Native students themselves influenced by the 'dumb Indian' stereotype make First Nation students feel that they do not belong in school. (p. 280)

Stereotypes are a serious problem for Aboriginal people, and since they exist at the high school, they are a problem for Aboriginal students there. They serve to keep this group at a disadvantage and damage their self-identity and may lead to self-fulfilling prophecies.

The questioning of a White student's stereotype during a focus group interview is an experience that critical pedagogy and anti-racism education might encourage. Open dialogue about issues of oppression is seen as a transformative tool; Dei (1996) argues that teachers should be able to openly discuss race in their classroom teaching and should cultivate an atmosphere where students feel comfortable talking about racial issues.

Hallway Pushing and Bumping

Ten participants (including teachers, White students and Aboriginal students) discussed physical contact in the hallways among people of different races. High school hallways are typically congested areas where one might expect a certain amount of pushing and bumping to occur naturally. It could be that these pushes and bumps

are accidental, as one White participant said: "Accidentally bumping into them, some Indians take it to the office and say was did it cause we are racist." Several students, however, identified this occurrence as evidence of racial tension. Because, as some teachers described it, there is underlying racial tension at the school, some students could interpret the bumping and shoving in the hallways as being racially motivated.

Racism or Personality Clash?

Five participants reported that conflicts between students of different racial backgrounds were more often personality clashes than racism. It is difficult to interpret this topic, without any information about the particular conflicts to which these participants refer. It is interesting, however, that four of the five people who claimed that incidents were personality clashes rather than racism were White. Since White people are not hurt the way non-Whites are by racism, it may be difficult for them at times to identify racism. Anne Bishop (2002) discusses this phenomenon:

> Remember that in the oppressor role you cannot see the oppression as clearly as the oppressed group can. When people point out your oppressive attitudes or language to you, your first response should be to believe it. Then it is time to ask questions and learn more about the oppression going on in that particular situation" (p. 115).

Since it can be so difficult to identify whether an incident is racially motivated or a personality clash, every situation, as Bishop writes, should be examined carefully.

Interpretation of Female Racial Incidents

Six participants in the study identified females as being the group most often engaged in racial conflicts. One interpretation of this phenomenon could be that male students of different races may have interacted more before high school in the context of organized sports like hockey. As some participants argued, knowing people from

other races personally reduced the potential for racism and conflict, even though Dunk's (1991) study claimed that this was not always so. In this case, girls may not have had as much of an opportunity to interact with each other, and this may result in increased conflict. Still, this explanation would account for only a small group of participants.

Another possible interpretation could be the issue of society's expectations of women and girls. In a White male-dominated society, women have less status and power than men (McIntosh, 1998). Adolescent women may be just starting to feel the pressure to conform to society's roles and may be feeling that lack of power. A teacher and a student both hinted at this when they discussed the "physical appearance motivation" of the fights and "insecurities." Girls are under enormous pressure to fit a certain role and look a certain way (PHAC, 1999, p. 47). Aggression might be one way that resistance to this pressure is manifested.

As discussed earlier, Aboriginal people have less power in society than do White people. Aboriginal women and girls then find themselves doubly at a disadvantage: not only is their race not favoured, but the same is true for their gender: "both formal studies and personal testimonies indicate that Aboriginal women rank among the most severely disadvantaged people in Canada" (Fleras & Elliott, 1999, p.175). As a result, diminished feelings of self worth, "...set the stage for individuals...to become self-destructive or, destructive toward one another." (UBCIC, 2000, p. 11). Conflicts involving Aboriginal female students can be understood as a response to diminished feelings of self worth.

Positive Race Relations

Four students (one Aboriginal and three White) discussed incidents of positive

race relations. These stories of positive race relations indicate that the race relations situation in this school is complex. There are instances of people taking positive steps to foster good race relations, just as there are others whose words or actions worsen race relations. This again mirrors the situation in Canadian society, where there are problems, but also positive initiatives to reduce racism: "Canada contains an awkward and baffling blend of hard-core racists and resolute anti-racists, with the vast majority of individuals wavering somewhere in between these extremes" (Fleras & Elliott, 1999, p. 65).

Aboriginal students interpreted teacher interest in Aboriginal culture as positive. One way to combat racism and become more sensitive to its victims is to learn about the oppressed group (Bishop, 1992; Yamato, 1998). This response sends a message of validation to members of the group. Teachers who respect minority culture and want to learn more about it help to reduce racism.

Teachers' Experiences with Race Relations

Within this third theme of the study, teachers' experiences with race relations, I address the implications of teaching a diverse class, absenteeism, and the issue of discomfort teaching a Native Studies class.

Implications of Teaching a Diverse Class

The teachers who discussed their experiences teaching a diverse class applied two approaches: one was to treat all students equally regardless of race, and the other was to take into account race when teaching. Treating students equally regardless of race hearkens back to the discussion in the review of literature about teachers'

treatment of students from racial minorities, and particularly the colour-blind approach. There are potential dangers when treating all students the same way, says Harper (1997): "...denying difference has the potential to eclipse the difficulties particular groups of students face" (p. 198).

It appears that teachers need to operate using the two seemingly contradictory maxims: "teachers should be colourblind" and "if you don't see the colour, you don't see the child". As Valli (1995) said, possessing these two views simultaneously can be crucial for teachers in this setting: recognizing the disadvantages and challenges that Aboriginal students face, but also seeing them as students in the classroom.

Absenteeism

The issue of absenteeism relates to minority student disengagement with school. The drop-out/push-out rate for racial minority and Aboriginal students is disproportionately high, pointing to systemic racism (Bolls, Tan & Austin, 1997). Reasons given for this situation must take into account a curriculum that does not reflect Aboriginal history, values and experience (Dei, 1996), negative stereotypes (Ponting, 1998), and the history of residential schools, which can create an anti-school culture (Maguire, 2001). Aboriginal students are disadvantaged by the school system. This can lead to disengagement in the form of absenteeism.

Discomfort in Teaching a Native Studies Class

It is understandable that three White teachers felt uncomfortable teaching the Native Studies course, as they are outsiders to the Aboriginal experience. Unfortunately for all involved, there are, at this point, no Aboriginal teachers in the

school available to teach it. The principal of the school told me that he recognizes the importance of having an Aboriginal teacher teach this course, and he had tried to find an Aboriginal teacher to teach this course, but was not able to find one. Dei (1999) writes about the importance of minority representation on school staff, to increase student identification with the school.

School Responses to Race Relations Situation

Within the fourth and final theme, school responses to the race relations situation, I discuss the implications of police involvement and the topic of addressing race relations in school.

Implications of Police Involvement

There was no information on the specific circumstances in which the police were involved in racial incidents. This makes it impossible to interpret the findings regarding police involvement. At the very least, police involvement indicates that certain types of racial incidents are taken very seriously by the school administration, to the point that they feel it necessary to take this action. What effect does this have on treating the particular problem? What is the effect on interracial relations? What is the effect on relations between staff and students? These are questions that may be answered by further research.

School's Role in Addressing Race Relations

As Thomas and Willinsky (1997) found in their study, and as I found in this study, students do place responsibility on schools to reduce and address race relations. Here,

students and teachers alike generated many possible ways of addressing racism in the school.

Four of the five students who suggested stronger punishment for racism were Aboriginal. It seems to follow then that some Aboriginal students believe that the punishment for racism now is not severe enough, and that toughening the penalties for racism would improve the situation. These students saw racism as a serious issue that should have more serious consequences.

The most popular suggestion, increasing communication about racism, shows that people want to talk about this issue. As discussed in the literature review, anti-racism education is an approach to reducing racism that encourages critical examination of society and history to discover the roots of oppression, and encourages open dialogue and debate about these issues (Dei, 1996). Anti-racism educators would argue that identifying, discussing, and directly challenging racism is the most effective strategy to combat it.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Racism exists in Canadian society. As Fleras and Elliott (1999) note, Canada is not unified in its relations: "Canada is neither a model of virtue when it comes to engaging diversity nor is it the "mother" of all evils; it probably falls somewhere in between" (p. 7). The same could be said of participants' perceptions of their high school. The school has problems, including stereotypes, slurs, and racial incidents, but also has its successes, such as a program to support Aboriginal students, teachers who discuss racism in their classrooms, and anti-racism initiatives.

In my study, I sought to answer three questions: What are student and teacher perceptions of the current status of race relations in the school? What are the lived experiences of students and teachers in regards to race relations in the school? And how do students and teachers feel racism in school should be addressed? Many words were written and spoken by participants on this subject during the course of data collection, which allowed me to construct a portrait of the race relations situation at the school. In this chapter, I provide an outline of the portrait of the school. The fine details are found in the preceding two chapters.

Students and teachers alike have a restricted understanding of racism. Definitions provided by participants included only individual acts of racism, and not the "quieter" forms of systemic and cultural racism. The implications of this limited definition include a lack of recognition for systemic disadvantage that Aboriginal students face in school, and also a lack of recognition of cultural racism, that underlying system which is embedded in society that allows for systemic and individual racism to exist. This

definition also means that White students can be considered to be victims of racism in the same way that Aboriginal students are.

Most participants thought that race relations in their school were fine, even though racist incidents were reported by many of these same students. This suggests that racism may be denied or trivialized because it is socially unacceptable. Teachers described racism as an undercurrent that flares up from time to time.

Many participants commented and criticized a double standard in place at the school in the way in which the administration of the school deals with White students and Aboriginal students. Many complained that treatment of the two groups is unequal. Unfortunately, this perception leads to resentment of the favoured group, who are seen as "getting off easy." The school administration may have good reasons for this unequal treatment, but this has not been communicated to students, and thus leads to interracial tension.

Some students are using racial slurs and jokes at school. Although some see this as an acceptable form of humour and tolerate racial slurs and joking, others are being hurt by it. Some tolerate racial slurs and joking. Also, stereotypes of Aboriginal people are common. Both forms of racism continue to put Aboriginal people at a disadvantage in school and in society. In the hallways of the high school, there is some pushing and shoving between members of different races. This may be one way that racial tensions are physically manifested. In addition, racial conflicts seem to often involve females.

Some teachers feel uncomfortable dealing with race relations issues. This may have the unintended effect of leaving these issues not dealt with. Yet, many students

and teachers do think that the school has a responsibility to deal with racism and suggested many ways that racism in the school could be reduced.

The study I conducted has provided a portrait, in participants' own words, of the state of race relations in one rural Northwestern Ontario secondary school. It adds to the research on race relations in schools by providing insight into a rural Canadian high school setting, and the unique dynamics of Aboriginal and White relations. In addition to adding to the research on race relations in schools, I hope that it will provide administrators, teachers and students with a better understanding of the racial dynamics at their school, and for this purpose I have included a series of recommendations for the school.

Recommendations

In this section I provide recommendations for both practice and further research based on the findings of this study.

Recommendations for Practice

1. The school and school board should keep a record of racist incidents on file, including a description of the event, what action was taken, and any follow-up that is required.
2. Teachers, staff and administration should meet to discuss how to implement the Board's Anti-Racism policy. This project should include the formulation of a detailed, long-term plan with a variety of strategies to address race relations issues in the school and to foster a positive environment that promotes the development of inter-racial relations.
3. Students and teachers should be provided with a comprehensive workshop or series of mini workshops on racism. An effective format might include a large group presentation and smaller group discussions. Topics to include:
    - discussion of definitions of racism, with emphasis on systemic and cultural racism;
    - discussion of "positive" racism, making clear that racism is always negative and causes harm;
    - discussion of who can be victims of racism (i.e. not White people in this setting);
    - what constitutes a racist joke and slur and how to respond to them;

- discussion of stereotypes and the harm they do.

4. Administration should examine and discuss the perceived double standards (one that White students claim favours Aboriginal students, and the other that Aboriginal students claim favours White students), considering their policies and explaining to all students the rationale for these policies.
5. Administration should provide teachers with professional development devoted to learning about Aboriginal history and culture, racism, the board's anti-racism policy, and training on anti-racism education so that discussion of racism is encouraged and teachers feel more comfortable addressing the issue in school.

6. The school board should set goals regarding the hiring of Aboriginal teachers to reflect the proportion of Aboriginal students in the school.
7. Teachers, staff and administration should examine the pushing/bumping issue in the hallways to find out if there is a way to alleviate congestion and reduce the potential for conflict in these areas.
8. A group of representatives from administration, teachers and the student body (both White and Aboriginal) should be formed with a mandate to:
    - review the school's Anti-Racism Day activities and make any changes that may be needed.
    - review the suggestions provided by students and teachers in this study regarding what schools should do about race relations and discuss which, if any, should be implemented.

- present to the school administration, based on the two reviews, recommendations on how to implement Anti-Racism Day and other suggestions for addressing race relations in the school.

This group should solicit suggestions and comments from all students, staff, teachers and administration as they conduct the reviews and make suggestions.

9. The school should start an anti-racism discussion group in the school for students, teachers, staff and administration.

Recommendations for Further Research

1. Research access to extra-curricular activities and sports among White students and Aboriginal students to determine whether access is equal, and if it is not, what consequences this might have on student engagement and achievement.
2. Research police involvement in racial incidents at the high school to determine the effect this intervention has on treating the problem, its effect on interracial relations, and its effect on student teacher relations.
3. Research the case of one reserve being more marginalized than the other, considering the intersection of race, class and geographic area.
4. Research the language, particularly, for example, use of personal pronouns, by Aboriginal students and other visible minorities in their definitions of racism.

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Appendix A: Writing Tasks

Student Writing Task

How would you describe the status of race relations in your school?

When answering, you may want to consider these questions:

- How do students of different races get along at your school?
- Are students ever treated differently by teachers, administration, or other students on the basis of their race? If so, in what way(s) are they treated differently?
- How do you define racism?
- How often does the subject of race or racism come up in school?
- What, if anything, should schools do to address racism?

Please write your response on the paper provided. On the top of your paper, please indicate your racial or ethnic background, but not your name. You have 30 minutes to complete this task.

Feel free to express your thoughts in any way(s) you like: an essay, a list, a personal experience, a poem...

If you are interested in participating in a student focus group discussion to talk about race relations in your school, please complete this section and return this cover sheet to your teacher.

Name:

Phone number:

Teacher Writing Task

How would you describe the status of race relations in your school?

When answering, you may want to consider these questions:

- How do students of different races get along at this school?
- How would you describe your teaching experiences with students of a different racial background from your own?
- How comfortable are you dealing with race relations issues at school?
- How do you define racism?
- Are students ever treated differently by teachers, administration, or other students on the basis of their race? If so, in what way(s) they treated differently?
- What, if anything, should schools do to address racism?

Feel free to express your thoughts in any way(s) you like: an essay, a list, a personal experience, a poem...

Please take approximately 30 minutes to complete this task

Please write your response on the paper provided. On the top of your paper, please indicate your racial or ethnic background, but not your name. Please enclose the completed writing task in the attached envelope and return it to the school office.

If you are interested in participating in a teacher focus group discussion to talk about race relations in your school, please complete this section and return it to me.

Name:

Phone number:

Appendix B: Interview Guides

Student Focus Group Guide

Background questions:

- What grade are you in?
- How old are you?
- This question is purposefully vague so that you can respond in any way that makes sense to you. How would you describe the state of race relations in your school?
- Suppose I was a new student at this school. What would you tell me about how students from different racial groups get along here?
- How would you describe your school in terms of fairness and equal treatment of all students?
- Do you think that non-White students face disadvantages at school?
- In your opinion, do people hold racial stereotypes at your school? If so, how can you tell?
- How do you define racism?
- What kinds of racial conflicts have occurred in your school?
- Have you personally experienced racism at school? If so, please explain.
- What should you do if you observe racism at school?
- How often is race or racism talked about at your school?
- To what extent is your school's curriculum multicultural?
- What do you believe a school's role should be in fostering positive race relations?
- What is your opinion of requiring students to take a class designed to teach about the histories, cultures, achievements, and problems of minority youth?

Teacher Focus Group Guide

Background Questions:

- How long have you been teaching at this school?
- How long have you been teaching in total?
- What subject(s) do you teach?
- This question is purposefully vague so that you can respond in any way that makes sense to you. How would you describe the state of race relations in your school?
- Suppose I was a new teacher at this school. What would you tell me about how different racial groups get along here?
- Let's say I was a teacher at this school teaching a large diverse class. What would I notice about how students of different races interact with each other?
- How would you describe your teaching experiences with students of a different racial background from your own?
- How would you describe your school in terms of fairness and equal treatment of all students?
- Do you think that non-White students face disadvantages at school?
- In your opinion, do people hold racial stereotypes at your school? If so, how can you tell?
- How do you define racism?
- What kinds of racial conflicts have occurred in your school?
- Have you personally experienced racism at school? If so, please explain.
- How often is race or racism talked about at your school?
- What should you do if you observe racism at school?
- How comfortable do you feel dealing with race relations issues at school?
- To what extent is your school's curriculum multicultural?

- What is your opinion of requiring students to take a class designed to teach about the histories, cultures, achievements, and problems of minority youth?

- What do you believe a school's role should be in fostering positive race relations?

- This last question may be particularly difficult to answer, but I'd like to get your thoughts on it. In thinking about race and education, to what extent is race important in education?

Appendix C: Cover Letter

April 1, 2003

Dear Participant,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. The purpose of the study is to explore and describe the perceptions of race relations in a secondary school. To collect this information, some students and teachers will participate in focus groups and some will complete a writing task. I will use the information from this study to prepare a Masters of Education thesis and I may report results later in professional journals or conferences.

To make sure that participants and the school remain anonymous, pseudonyms will be used. Your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. There are no known risks or benefits associated with participating in this research. Data will remain confidential and will be securely stored at Lakehead University for seven years and then destroyed.

After the study has been completed, a summary of the findings will be available. If you are interested in receiving it, please indicate on the bottom of the attached consent form.

Please complete and sign the attached consent form. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please do not hesitate to contact me or my faculty supervisor, Dr. Connie Russell.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Oussoren, MEd Student
Phone:
E-mail:

Dr. Connie Russell, Supervisor
Faculty of Education, Lakehead University
955 Oliver Road
Thunder Bay, Ontario P7B 5E1
Phone: 807-343-8049

Consent Form

A Qualitative Case Study of
Student and Teacher Perceptions of Race Relations in a
Rural, Northwestern Ontario Secondary School
Jennifer Oussoren

I, _____ have read and understood the cover letter and am aware that there are no known risks or benefits involved in this research. I realize that all of the data that is collected will be confidential and that I may withdraw at any time from the study.

_____ _____

Signature of Participant Date

If participant is under the age of 18:

_____

Name of Parent

_____ _____

Signature of Parent Date

If you would like to learn the results of this study, please provide your address:

Appendix D

Interview Volunteer Sign-up Letter

To _____'s English Class,

I'm the student who is doing a study for my Master's of Education on peoples' perceptions of race relations at a high school. I received the writing exercises that you did for my study a few weeks ago, and I wanted to thank you for writing down your thoughts. The writing exercises you did for me will help a lot with my research.

My next step is to find some students who'd like to volunteer to be part of a group interview to talk about race relations. If you volunteered, you'd be part of a 4-6 person group who would meet one day after school for about an hour to have a tape recorded conversation about race relations at your school. The questions I'd ask would be similar to the ones on the writing exercise you did. Why volunteer? The experience of being part of a research study, a chance to talk about an interesting topic, and lots of free pizza.

If you're interested or want to know more, please sign up on the sheet below. I'll give those who volunteer a call soon to let them know when and where the group interview will be.

Thanks again!

-Jennifer Oussoren